



HERMIT
ISLAND

• KATHERINE LEE BATES •



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LANDING AT THE ISLAND.

HERMIT ISLAND

BY

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Conquer we shall, but we must first contend;
'Tis not the fight that crowns us, but the end.

— ROBERT HERRICK.

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HERMIT ISLAND.

CHAPTER I.

THE MOONLIGHT PATH.

When first the moon frae the saut sea peeped,
She kythed like maiden's gouden kemb,
And the sleepy waves washed o'er her brow,
And bell'd her cheek with the briny faem.

But the yellow leme spread up the lift,
And the stars grew dim before her e'e,
And up arose the Queen of Night
In all her solemn majesty.

— JAMES HOGG.

IT was a tranquil summer evening, and the long waves of the Atlantic broke gently, even caressingly, on the sandy shores of Hermit Island. The moon, almost at the full, slowly climbed the sky, which still flushed with the last faint colors of sunset. Over the broad expanse of water drooped large drifts of cloud, soft and tender-colored, their delicate lines of pink and

rose reflected in broken lights from the restless surface of the ocean. Occasionally an idle flash of lightning, leaping from a dark-blue belt of gloom far off to the eastward, quivered across the waves. North of the island could be dimly discerned the low, curving line of the Maine coast, the red gleam of a revolving light flashing every alternate minute into view. A few film-like sails glimmered on the horizon, and between the island and the mainland a dory was in sight, but so far away that it seemed to lie motionless on the water. Every now and then a seal bobbed up his brown head to take the air. The tide was coming in, and each successive wave, rearing itself erect for one brief instant, displayed a green wall glinting with diamond radiance, suddenly toppling and falling with a musical splash in a cascade of curling, crisping, white-glistening foam.

At the eastern point of the island, watching the play of the surf, stood a solitary figure, a man, evidently a gentleman, dressed in rusty black. His head, the thick brown hair besprinkled with gray, was bare. His shoulders were rounded, one leg was thrown slightly forward, resting against the keel of a discarded dory, and his hands were clasped behind him.

“A wasted life!” he murmured to himself; “a wasted life! Is mine a wasted life? Who has a

right to call it so? What is waste, and what is failure? The waves break on the beach, one after another, one after another, one after another, and for some there is glory of daylight, and for some beauty of moonlight, and for some dimness of fog and mist or blackness of clouded midnight. Yet even the darkest share in the great tide-movements, leap and fall and are lost to view, and others press after. Shall the sunlit wave condemn the wave of the shadow? The wave-life is not in the sparkle that flashes from it, nor in the nature of the shore it washes — populous strand or undiscovered wild, but in obedience to the tidal law. A wasted life! The friends of my youth shake their heads, when they talk of me. My place in the world has long closed over. A wasted life! Ah, God, is it you who call it so?"

The speaker was roused from his reverie by the ring of a clear young voice crying joyfully, "Oh, Uncle Maurice! Uncle Maurice!"

Turning with a start and looking back, Maurice Yorke waved his hand cheerfully to two slight girlish figures that were scrambling down the sandy bluff to join him. Above could be seen sparse knots of grasses and coarse green weeds, dotted with yellow patches of wild mustard. Between the foot of the bluff and the water lay

a narrow strip of dry, soft-sanded beach, in which even the light steps of the girls made deep footprints.

Of what station in life these island maidens might be, it was at first sight hard to surmise. There was nothing rustic in their features, but nothing conventional in their dress; they were brown and agile as young gypsies, and a subtle likeness, even in the face of marked and obvious unlikeness, suggested that they were sisters. For age, they might have been in their early teens, but it was difficult to determine which was the elder. The one in advance was noticeable for a wealth of wavy auburn hair, which floated back upon the light sea-wind as she ran, and for a singularly rosy, laugh-loving, kiss-inviting little mouth. Her companion was smaller, darker, less attractive, with peculiarly black eyebrows, from beneath which the black eyes looked out strangely enough, suspiciously, defiantly, and yet with a certain hunger in their gaze. The foremost sped as fast as the clinging sands would permit to the benignant-faced, dreamy-eyed loiterer whom she had hailed as Uncle Maurice, clasping one of his extended hands in both her own and drawing him down with her into a sitting posture upon the beach. The other stood aloof, biting the end of her long black braid and watching, now the roll-

ing waters and now the mounting moon, which had diffused about itself a misty yellow halo.

"Come and sit down with us, Dolo," called Uncle Maurice, kindly. "Del and I will feel lazy, if you persist in standing."

"Yes, do, Dolo, and we'll play we're King Canute. Keep your distance, old ocean. Don't you dare cross this mark," cried Del, gaily, grooving a line in the sand with the heel of her bare brown foot, for both girls were guiltless of shoes and stockings.

"I'm not King Anybody — I'm myself," replied Dolo, speaking with a curious abruptness, each short, swift sentence breathless at the end.

"Oh, come, Dolo; come, and I'll give you my evening primroses to wear," teased Del, snatching a posy of the yellow blossoms from the sash of frayed and faded satin ribbon, once pink, tied incongruously enough about the waist of her flannel frock, coarse in texture, gray in color and severely plain in make. Her sister wore a dress precisely similar, but relieved by neither sash nor flowers.

Dolo wrinkled her nose disdainfully.

"You may keep your old primroses," she said; "I don't wear wilted flowers."

"But these ar'n't wilted," protested Del.

Dolo shrugged her shoulder.

"Does the flower-soul die when the flower is picked, Uncle Maurice?" asked Del, tickling her friend's cheek with the nosegay to wake him from his dream.

"God forbid!" murmured Uncle Maurice, without turning his tranquil gaze from the sea, which was already touched with gold by the beams of the rising moon.

"Sure enough!" exclaimed Del, catching up his suggestion with the lightness peculiar to her nature; "'twas only the primrose bodies that died when I picked them, and now their souls shall go to heaven," and aiming at the golden reflection, Del flung the flowers upon the tide, which presently washed them up again at Dolo's feet. Dolo surveyed them in silence for a moment, then stooped suddenly and caught them back from the reach of the following wave. Something in the look of the wet, rejected blossoms seemed to soften her mood, for she carried them toward the bluff and laid them down, with a tender, consoling stroke, in one of the patches of wild mustard.

"That's not heaven-gold. That's only earth-gold," called Del's blithesome tones.

Dolo shrugged her shoulder, this time almost angrily. "Don't talk nonsense. They're nothing but flowers," she said, in her short, curt fashion.

"That's just like Dolo," pouted Del. "She never will play anything, Uncle Maurice. We were over at the pine-tree this afternoon, and I wanted her to make believe it was a forest, and I was Sleeping Beauty, and she was the Prince who scratched his hands for seven days pushing through the thickets, to find me there at last; but Dolo said it wasn't a forest; it was only an ugly little scrub-pine."

Uncle Maurice smiled involuntarily, as there arose before his mental vision the forlorn image of the one tree on the island — graceless, stunted, the bare trunk diverging half way up into two gaunt branches, also bare, save for the green tuft of needles crowning each. It was a pine in which the smallest and meanest of all the crows would have disdained to build a nest. No wonder that Dolo found it too great a strain upon her imagination to transform it into a forest.

"But what's the good of having a tree on the island," asked Del, "if you can't make believe it's a forest or a castle or a tower, or whatever you want? Dolo might as well have a yardstick. She can't do anything with the tree."

"I can climb it," said Dolo, shortly.

"What's the good of climbing it," persisted Del, "unless you make believe it's the mast of a wrecked ship and you're looking out for rescue,

or a lighthouse and you must trim the lamps, or something else? What's the good of climbing it?"

"To show I can," retorted Dolo, flinging a scornful glance of the black eyes over her shoulder. "You can't. You always slip back."

"Tut, tut!" said Uncle Maurice, gently, pulling a soft felt hat from one of his pockets and drawing it down significantly over his ears.

Del laughed and sifted a handful of sand into the hat-rim, saying lightly —

"You don't love to hear us quarrel, do you, Uncle Maurice? I'm sorry, for we shall have to do it, all the same. We never agreed yet on anything in this world, except being fond of you. But we agree on that, don't we, Dolo?"

Uncle Maurice, his wistful, irresolute mouth breaking into a smile, drew Del closer to his side and held out his disengaged hand to Dolo. But Dolo, unresponsive, bit the crispy end of her black braid in silence. Del continued to chatter.

"I remember the first present you ever gave us. It was when we were little girls, just after father had brought us to the island, and everything seemed so strange and lonesome. It was a board of marbles — a solitaire you called it — something you had found in the notion shop over on the coast. There was a way to jump the mar-

bles off, so as to leave just one in the middle. Dolo worked and worked till she could do it, and then she never played with the board again. But I used to spend hours at a time talking with the marbles, and I know them all to-day as well as I know the people on the island."

"Tell me about them," coaxed Uncle Maurice, stroking the wavy hair; "I want to enlarge my circle of acquaintance."

"There are six families of them," explained Del, lowering her voice confidentially—"the royal family, the wise family, the warlike family, the commonplace family, the sinful-holy family and the poetic family. The father of the royal family is king of all the marbles. He's the most beautiful amber, with sparkling gold spots in him. And his sons are all striped in different colors, like rainbows. The eldest, the crown prince, is big and splendid. His colors are the richest. The next is quiet-colored—sober and thoughtful in disposition. The next is my particular anxiety. His colors are too bold and they don't blend well. He's inclined to be wild and is always heading insurrections. The youngest is a promising boy—bright-colored, with white stripes here and there. The crown prince is especially proud and fond of him. The fathers of all the other families sit in council with the king, but the father of the

wise family is prime minister. You would like him ever so much. He is such a kind, pleasant blue, and all the other blue marbles are his sons. Most of them are good. The oldest is a lovely character—all heaven-colored. The next oldest is a dark blue, with flashes in him. We think that he is capable of great things, if he isn't led astray by pride and ambition. The wild prince has a bad influence over him, but Heaven-Blue is his good angel. It's delightful to see brothers so devoted to each other. But the third son has a vicious, yellow-brown spot in him, which makes him incline to all sorts of badness. He gives his poor father no end of trouble. The others are nothing remarkable—just fine, high-spirited boys, all except the youngest, who is an unhappy little invalid, rough and scarred all over. His big brothers are very patient with him. The warlike family is the largest. They are all green. The father is—oh, so brilliant!—a dazzling hero! He always leads the battle charges, shouting, 'For King and Honor!' But his eldest sons are big, stupid bullies, dull and blotchy, and his next to the youngest—such a horrid color!—is just depraved. There are only three that are respected by the other marbles, and one of those is more liked than respected. He is light green, with a curly gray band. He is lazy, but good-natured.

But one is brave and noble, and the smallest one is plucky, though not noble. You would see the difference in a minute, if I had them here. There are only four in the commonplace family—all brown. The father is the best. His color is soft and deep. But the twins are just hard-headed, uninteresting boys. The little one has a flash of yellow in him, though, and is sometimes really quite witty. The sinful-holy family is the family I'm sorrowfulest about. It ought to be white, but the father is a cloudy old ruffian, with a horrible red streak right through his heart, and the eldest son takes after him. The next son is my comfort. He is the saintliest of all my marbles and the most intimate friend of Heaven-Blue. He has an excellent influence over his two younger brothers. One of them is sweet-tempered and honorable, but not very—what is it you call it, Uncle Maurice, *spiritual*?—and the white of the other is part clear and part dim, so he's always wavering between good and evil. The poetic family are transparent, with little bright flowers inside. They are all unworldly, but I think only one of them is a genius. He has stars inside, not flowers. Oh, I wish I had my marbles here, and then you would understand better. Though I am such a big girl, Uncle Maurice, I like to play with my families yet.

You don't know what exciting times we all have, with wars and plots and rebellions and things."

Dolo gave her impatient shrug of the left shoulder. Uncle Maurice laughed a low, indulgent, lingering laugh, pleasant to hear.

"But you haven't any mothers or any daughters in your families," he said.

"Why, no," responded Del, in a surprised tone; "of course not. How funny! It wouldn't be—it wouldn't be appropriate with marbles. Besides, there ar'n't any. Don't you see? I can't make the marbles what I choose. They are what they are, and I see it; that's all. But there are plenty of mothers and daughters, brides and sweethearts, too, among my shells. The little, white, slender lady-shells go out driving with the big, bright-colored hero-shells in the dearest shell-carriages you ever saw. The next time you come over to our house, I'll show you my shells, and tell you all about them. When I was small and could play with them all I liked, without being laughed at, there used to be a wedding, or a duel, or an elopement, or a funeral, every single day. But see! the boys are almost in."

"I could have told you that long ago," said Dolo. For while they had been chatting, sturdy strokes had brought the dory nearer and nearer, until now it had reached the edge of the surf. It

was never an easy matter to bring a boat in safely over the breakers, and the little group on the beach became silent, watching with interest, but without anxiety, the maneuvers of the young oarsmen. Robert Yorke and his brothers were expert boatmen, but in spite of their skill and caution, a great foaming wave, following too closely in the rear of one they had just surmounted, broke over the stern of the dory and drenched the nearest boy, Nathan, from head to foot. A shout of laughter broke from Robert and Eric, with which Del's silvery treble gaily blended, and even Nathan's father smiled at the disconsolate aspect of his son, who was trying in vain to find a dry place on his jacket-sleeve, with which to wipe his face. Dolo alone did not join in the merriment, her dark eyes keenly noting every element of the ridiculous in the picture, but her strange little face impassive. A moment more and the boat was dexterously beached, Mr. Yorke and the girls walking on to the landing point for the purpose of joining the youthful sailors and seeing what they had brought over from the coast. Robert, dark-haired and red-cheeked, a manly young fellow with the dusky promise of a mustache on his upper lip, turned to greet them, handing his father a packet of newspapers and magazines.

“Anything for us?” asked Del.

Dolo shrugged her left shoulder. She was angry with Del for asking. As if there was ever anything for them!

"Not this time, Del," replied Robert, with the friendly, smiling look that was so much at home on his tanned face; "father is the only one of us in luck to-day. Here, Eric, shoulder these groceries for Cap'n Noll, like a good fellow, and if Nat will take Mr. Rexford's, I can manage ours."

Eric, a mischievous-faced laddie, who looked, with his frank, blue eyes and curly, chestnut hair, as if he might be the son of an old Norse Viking, scrambled back into the boat after the provision bags, which were snugly wrapped about with a piece of canvas and an old water-proof coat.

"Good enough! I thought the books had got wet, for sure, when Nat caught his ducking," called the boy; "but they're dry as—as"—

"Yes, go ahead, now—as what?" growled Nat, closely occupied in wringing water out of such handfuls of his apparel as he could conveniently seize.

But Eric was not quick at similes, and Dolo broke in eagerly, yet with a perceptible shyness and restraint even in her eagerness—

"More books, Rob? What are they?"

"I don't know, Dolo," replied Robert, kindly;

for there was always a peculiar gentleness in the big fellow's manner toward this wild, reticent little neighbor of his, with the bright, unsatisfied eyes; "I can't tell you. Father put his list in an envelope for safe keeping, as he always does, and the clerk made up the package while I was fumbling around at the dry goods counter, trying to match the unmatchable for Grandma Brimblecomb. I suspect Baby Merry is to have a new pinafore or some other furbelow that will make Nick more her slave than ever—not to mention the cap'n. So you must ask father about the books."

Dolo faced silently about upon Mr. Yorkè.

"All in good time, my child," he said, in answer to her look and attitude; "but a pleasure is twice a pleasure when it is a surprise. Here, Robert, haven't you something for me to take?"

"No, sir," replied Robert, cheerily, trudging along the south beach with the lion's share of the cargo upon his back and in his capacious pockets, while the rest of the party followed in a flock. "I'm even trimmed. Couldn't spare a pound from either side without losing my balance. And we couldn't overload that drowned rat there, while as for Eric, I'll risk his ever dying of hard work. He's lazy on principle, to keep Old Susannah in countenance."

"Hear that!" exclaimed Eric, "when I am weighted down like a camel. I wish I was Nat. I believe he got wet on purpose."

Their father, indifferent to this boyish banter, had already stayed his steps, evidently not expecting that his offer of assistance would be accepted, and had turned to look out once more over the wide waters.

"Wait, children," he said, authoritatively; "the moonlight has a message for us. Shall we be deaf when Nature speaks in such accents as these?"

Dolo's black eyes flashed three swift glances at the burdens under which the three boys were bending, but Del fell back to Mr. Yorke's side, clinging affectionately to his arm, and the lads halted good-naturedly, though with more of patience than enthusiasm in their manner, for in addition to the weight of the loads, they were supperless and tired with the long pull from the mainland. But the scene was well worth the gaze. The sunset colors had faded, so that now the soft amethyst of the sky melted imperceptibly into the soft amethyst of the ocean. One faithful star shone in the wake of the moon, which no longer glinted palely on the water, but cast across the waves a broad path of amber light, widening with distance and twinkling with innumerable flakes of gold.

They looked in silence for a few moments, and then Mr. Yorke's voice was heard saying in the monotonous, far-away tone of one talking in a reverie—

“You are glad waves to-night, because the moon, whose sway you own, is no chill, distant monitress, but a present joy and glory, shedding upon you the very mantle of her splendor. And yet, when she withdraws again, as soon she will, into mysterious gloom, lending not a ray to light you in your tasks, not the faintest gleam to signify her acceptance or even knowledge of your service, still with ebb and flow you will answer her high bidding no less loyally than now—no less loyally, though we who listen shall hear you sobbing in the dark.”

Dolo, protected by the dusk, shrugged her left shoulder, but not as emphatically as usual, and silence fell again upon the little company, broken by Eric, who spoke in an undertone—

“What do you think it looks like, Rob—that moonshine on the sea? It makes me think of Jacob's ladder.”

Robert laughed softly. “I'm not much of a fellow for fancies,” he answered, shifting his heavy provision-bag from one shoulder to the other; “I was only thinking it would be mighty convenient if the moon would play pilot once in

a while, and guide a ship through the rocks by a path like that. It seems rather thrown away on such open sailing as ours here."

"Life is not open sailing—even ours here," suggested his father, still dreamily; "I could wish for a lighted path before me to mark the way."

"It looks to me," said Del, "as if a procession of little yellow-slipped moon-fairies had been dancing across the sea and their feet had left twinkles wherever they touched the water."

"Thetis' tinsel-slipper'd feet," murmured Mr. Yorke, but nobody except Eric, and perhaps the ghost of Milton, with the dimmer ghost of old Homer behind him, caught the words, and certainly Eric, growing more and more conscious of an aching void where his supper should have been, failed to make the connection of ideas.

Mr. Yorke presently continued, baring his head as he spoke—"This moonlight path is so like my thought of the golden streets of the New Jerusalem, I could almost expect to see the spirits of the blest come gliding down it toward us."

Del clasped her little brown hands tightly on the rusty coat-sleeve.

"Oh, if mamma could only come!" she said, the tears brimming her uplifted eyes.

Dolo turned abruptly and walked away. All her movements were swift and supple. Robert

cast a hesitating glance after the deserter, then another toward his father, still lost in musing, and finally spoke with a certain respectful firmness in his tone—

“It’s getting late, sir. Miss Lucas will be wondering where the girls are, and mother will be wanting to clear the table and go to bed; besides, here’s Nat shivering in his wet clothes. So, if you’ll excuse us, I think we must be going on.”

Mr. Yorke waved his hand abstractedly, and the young people, leaving him standing on the edge of the beach, with his face uplifted to the great, golden orb of the moon, moved away up shore, Del keeping close to the water-line, only starting back a step or two with a merry outcry, whenever some especially enterprising wave succeeded in splashing her bare ankles. Eric trudged on beside her, fretting a little, as a hungry and tired boy will, under his burden, but laughing more, while Robert, three times as heavily laden, swung along a few paces in advance, smiling but silent.

Nat had pushed on ahead to overtake Dolo, who cast one black-eyed glance at the wet, awkward young fellow, the only ill-favored scion of the house of Yorke, and then kept her gaze steadfastly fixed upon the moonlight path.

"What made you go away so all at once?" asked Nat, stammering a little in his utterance.

Dolo shrugged her left shoulder.

"You know," she said.

"Because Del was talking about" —

Dolo nodded.

"But you can't remember," said Nat.

"Can't I?" returned Dolo, scornfully. They were of laconic speech, this dark-visaged little girl and the tall, sandy-haired, gray-eyed boy beside her. After a few minutes of rapid walking, Dolo stepping lightly and surely and Nat stumbling over every tangle of seaweed and splashing into every hole and gully, Dolo spoke again.

"Did Uncle Maurice suppose you boys wanted nothing but moonshine for your supper?"

"Don't you pitch into my father," replied Nat, almost fiercely.

"Then don't you drip water on me," retorted Dolo, with seeming irrelevance.

"Father was all right," insisted Nat; "we fellows weren't so terrible hungry that we couldn't spare five minutes for a picture like that. There are suppers enough, first and last, but full moon comes only once a month."

"And the bags weren't heavy, I suppose?" said Dolo.

"Not so very," replied Nat, loyally.

Dolo laughed a short little laugh, with a blending of amusement and kindness in it.

"I like you, Nat," she remarked.

Nat stumbled over a hillock of sand and had a curious sensation as if he were all legs and awkwardness.

After they had walked on in silence a while longer, Nat asked, "What does that moonlight look like to you?"

"Like moonlight," said Dolo, curtly. "What does it look like to you?"

"Like nothing—not even like moonlight," rejoined Nat, with something of his father's dreamy manner upon him; but he presently said with more energy, as he put down his bag for an instant and swung his long arms together to get them warm, chilled as they were by the clinging sleeves of the wet jacket—

"The thing I thought, while all the rest were talking, was only that it would be good if something to help us could come sailing over that yellow track to the island—something to change all our lives, yours and mine and father's and everybody's."

"Let's pretend it will," exclaimed Dolo, with a sudden change of tone; "we know it won't, but just for once let's pretend."

"Well; there's nothing coming now," said Nat.

"To-morrow night, then," said Dolo; "to-morrow night we shall see a boat with our good fortune in it sailing to us over that shining path."

Nat stared at her strangely in the moonlight.

"'Twould be queer if we should," he said, slowly; "but most things are queer."

CHAPTER II.

THE ISLANDERS.

Not a blade of grass but has a story to tell, not a heart but has its romance, not a life which does not hide a secret that is either its thorn or its spur. Everywhere grief, hope, comedy, tragedy.

— HENRI-FRÉDÉRIC AMIEL.

WAKE up, Dolo," murmured Del, sleepily, turning her head on her hard, flat pillow; "Miss Lucas has called us twice."

Dolo, standing already dressed by the open window, deigned no response, and drowsy Del, feeling that she had done her duty by her sister, dropped off into another nap.

It was a fair, fresh morning. The sky, pale blue at the horizon, but deepening into brightest azure toward the zenith, was cloudless. The wide expanse of ocean, sapphire-shaded, dimpled, lit by a million ripples of sunshine, extended as far as eye could reach. The billows broke songfully on the shore, the instantaneous wave-wall now revealing hints of emerald and umber and

now flashing with belts and patches of dazzling, silvery light. The tide was just beginning to ebb, and the surf, shattered into coquettish wavelets, curled and crisped and bubbled and shimmered on the glittering wet sand.

"Breakfast is ready," said a voice from below stairs. It was a singular voice, dull and even, with almost no play of intonations. Del started at the sound.

"Oh, Dolo, why didn't you wake me? I shall be late."

"I sha'n't," coolly responded Dolo, and walked out of the small, rough-boarded chamber with an exasperatingly indifferent air.

Del, a shade of vexation showing for an instant, but no longer, upon her winsome face, tossed back her mass of auburn tresses which, as she stood a moment by the window, the sunshine with a Midas touch transformed to waving gold, and hummed a light tune while hurrying her toilet.

The tune ceased, however, as she clambered down the ladder-like stairway and entered the dining-room. This was long and low, with unpainted walls, scant, plain furniture, and shelves holding a frugal supply of the coarsest table-ware. There was no trace of ornament anywhere discernible. At one end of the forbidding apartment stood a round table spread for breakfast. About this

family board, partaking in silence of coffee, oatmeal and Johnny-cake, sat Mr. Rexford, Miss Lucas the housekeeper, and Dolo. Mr. Rexford was a man who would at once attract and puzzle observation. His hair, though thick, was white, his stern face was deeply graven, and his general aspect indicated the prime of middle life. Miss Lucas, who sat opposite him, was large and dark, with an expressionless, almost stolid face. She wore a mourning brooch at her throat and a mourning ring on her left hand, but for the rest her dress was a well-worn alpaca, made with the same ungraceful severity of pattern that characterized the gray flannel frocks of Del and Dolo. It was supplemented at the neck by a narrow linen collar.

Dolo, looking smaller, darker and colder than ever, sat between the two. When Del entered, Dolo had already pushed back her saucer, but she had not quitted her seat. In reality, Dolo wanted another piece of Johnny-cake, but the plate was beyond her reach, and she would at any time go without a desired article of food rather than ask any one to pass it to her. She waited, however, in the hope that her father might soon withdraw, leaving her at liberty to jump up and help herself.

Del took her place at the table without bidding the family good-morning or asking Miss Lucas to

excuse her tardiness. These courtesies were not exacted or expected here. Nor was any word of greeting or rebuke spoken to her, although Mr. Rexford glanced at the clock and drew his white eyebrows nearer together—a slight movement, yet enough to call the rose-color into Del's cheeks and a malicious sparkle to Dolo's eyes. Miss Lucas poured for the late-comer a glass of milk and handed her a saucer of oatmeal without speaking. As Del helped herself to a square of Johnny-cake from the plate that stood before her, she noticed Dolo's look following her hand, and, yielding to one of her natural sunny impulses, broke the frigid silence by saying smilingly, as she lifted the plate—

“Miss Lucas, Dolo would like another bit.”

“No, I wouldn’t,” said Dolo, promptly; and pushed back her chair.

As Del, a few minutes later, pushed back her own, Mr. Rexford turned upon her with a listless question—

“Who brought in our groceries last night, Delia?”

“Nathan Yorke, sir.”

“Tell him to come over at four o’clock this afternoon for Calculus, and I will settle the bill.”

“It’s Robert who keeps the accounts, sir,” said Del.

Mr. Rexford's black eyes flashed. The resemblance between himself and Dolo grew marked. His voice was no longer listless.

"You heard what I said?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then do it."

"Yes, sir."

Mr. Rexford took a straw hat from a peg behind the door, and strode out over the bluff toward the beach, attended only by his shadow. It always seemed to the children that his shadow was darker than any other cast on the island.

It must be confessed, however, that the island measured but three miles in length. As for width, it was an irregular right-angled triangle in shape, with the right angle to the northwest, the base running down for something more than a mile into the Atlantic. It was upon Hypotenuse Beach, as the mathematical Nathan had dubbed it — the beach which faced the ocean — or in one case upon the upland just above, that the four residences of Hermit Island were built, one solitary little hut in the southwest corner, the remaining three, which had all been originally designed for summer cottages, and had been rudely patched so as to offer a more or less effectual resistance to the wintry weather, further to the east. The favorite point of observation was the eastern tip,

where the beholder could turn at will from the coast-line on the left to the ocean view before and on the right. It was here that Mr. Yorke had been musing in the moonlight, waiting for the return of the dory in which his sons made their weekly trip to the mainland, and brought back supplies for the families who dwelt in the three neighboring houses. The lonely hut was inhabited by a very old and eccentric recluse, the Hermit, from whom, some fifty years before, when he was the only resident, the island had derived its name. The cottage nearest his own, though distant by more than a mile, was the Rexford house, bare and comfortless without and within. Del and Dolo were always glad to escape the cheerless rooms, whose blank walls echoed no merry voices nor sounds of song and laughter; gladder still to escape the lifeless housekeeper, from whose lips they had never heard a harsh word, but in whose eyes they had never seen a loving smile; and gladdest of all to escape the dreaded father, whose gloomy silence chilled their glad young blood and blighted all the natural home-gaiety of girlhood.

Within five minutes after Del had pushed back her chair, while Miss Lucas was gathering up the breakfast dishes and mechanically going about the various household tasks, in which she never

asked the girls to help her, those two brown little gypsies were already over the bluff and out upon the beach, on their way to school. The figure of their father—a slender, erect, even graceful form—was seen pacing the shore toward the western side of the island, his favorite haunt, because the farthest removed from his neighbors. As for the Hermit, Mr. Rexford and he were excellent strangers. If they chanced to meet, they averted their faces by common consent and passed each other in silence. The girls looked after their father for a moment and then took the opposite direction, their spirits rising with every step away from home.

They were barefooted, as on the evening before, but this morning they wore upon their heads cloth caps with vizors. The fresh energy of the early day possessed them both. Del caroled snatches of sailor-songs as she tripped lightly over the glistening sand, and Dolo, catching up her short skirts, raced back and forth with the waves, running knee-deep into the water. As they approached the second cottage, a cozy, gaily-painted little structure with the stars and stripes flying from a flag-staff on the edge of the roof, Dolo, who was in advance, turned suddenly, laying her finger on her lip and pointing with the other hand to a small figure seated upon the

piazza steps. Del failed at first to notice the gesture and went on blithely trolling—

“A wet deck and a flowing sea,
And a wind that follows fast,
And fills the white and rustling sail
And bends the gallant mast!”

Dolo's black eyes snapped with impatience, but in an instant more Del had seen her signal and hushed the spirited strains, following softly after Dolo, who led the way with a peculiarly noiseless, agile, Indian-like motion to the hither side of the piazza, so that they were sheltered from the observation of the child upon the steps, her back being toward them, while they themselves, by standing on tiptoe and peeping over the rail, could both see and hear. What they saw was a little girl of three or four summers, dressed in a wide straw hat, with fluttering blue ribbons, a tiny red sacque, rubbed white on the under side of the sleeves, a blue skirt, prettily embroidered, and a pair of stubby, rusty-red shoes. The face was turned away, bent over a large, square picture-book, but the rounded outlines of the baby form were attractive, and so were the soft, golden-brown locks of hair, blowing about the small brown ears and curling low in the small brown neck. What they heard was an irregular chant,

delivered with much gusto in a cooing baby voice, the wee reader evidently improvising words and music to please herself—

“This is about seven young owls
And seven chick-fowls.

“The chick-fowls lived in a great big large hole in a thunder-cloud, an’ once they flewed so fast, their wings got flewed off. An’ the owls laughed an’ said, ‘Aint it funny and aint it elegant to see seven chick-fowls with their wings all flewed off?’ Then comed along a little boy, all sickie, an’ the doctor looked at his pulse an’ said, ‘You must fly a kite quicker’n nothin’, or you’ll die, die, die. You’ll die. You’ll die.’ Then the little boy flied the kite an’ it went up, up, up—way past the owls and the chick-fowls, way up to heaven. An’ God said, ‘You lovely kite! You’ve been so good, I’m goin’ to let you have a breeze all day.’ An’ the kite flied. An’ the kite flied.

“An’ by an’ by
It flied so high,
It flied so high an’ bold,
It never comed back,
It never comed back,
It never comed back till old.”

The conclusion of this thrilling narrative was greeted with a roar of gruffest, proudest laughter, and out upon the piazza strutted an enormous-bodied, triple-chinned old gentleman, whom a single eye-blink would recognize anywhere as a retired sea-captain. Sailor was written all over him—in the rolling gait, bronzed face and neck and tattooed wrists, no more distinctly than in the twinkling gray eyes and breezy, jolly, independent presence, while his pompous strut and certain autocratic lines about the mouth revealed the monarch of the deck.

“Well done, my hearty!” he vociferated, catching the flushed and frowning child up in his arms and swinging her to a seat on his great shoulder; “you didn’t think as how gramp was hiding in the hall and hearing all that nice little yarn now, did you? An’ if here aint the girls hidin’, too! Ho, ho, ho! Mornin’ to you both! Come in, come in; well, now—well! I thought the sunrise was over long ago, but I see my Lady Blue-eyes has caught the pinkest of it on her cheeks.”

Del, blushing and dimpling, ran lightly up the steps, but Dolo remained where she was, standing on the ground below the piazza. From this station she reached up her arms over the rail and called to the baby with a soft, inarticulate cooing-sound.

Baby Merry—short for America, so named because her great brown eyes first looked upon the world on the glorious Fourth of July—having a poetic yearning for solitude during such times as she delivered herself of her improvisations, was ill-pleased to find that on this occasion she had been out-witted. The delicate-featured, clear-complexioned little face, brown as an acorn, was clouded with anger, the rose-bud mouth pouted, the wee brows puckered, the brown eyes brimmed with passionate tears.

“Le’ me down, you naughty, naughty gramp, or I’ll bump you all up,” she cried, defiantly, her little brown fists beating a vigorous tattoo on her grandfather’s grizzled pate.

He set her down hastily, with an exclamation whose only virtue was emphasis, and the child, striking away Del’s extended hand, flew to Dolo, who lifted her over the piazza rail to the ground. Here Baby Merry, winking back her tears, clung silently to Dolo’s skirt, the girl’s dark face, bent downward toward the little one, transfigured into beauty by the sudden glow of tenderness that transfused it. She barely touched the baby’s quivering chin with one swift finger, but the child was comforted. She nestled closer to Dolo, patting and stroking the folds of the rough frock, and presently looked up, in response to some low,

coaxing word, with a smile which flooded all her tiny face with sunshine.

The captain, who had been surveying with a rueful stare the results of his rash intrusion, drew a long breath of relief, inflating his broad chest until it revealed, above the low collar of the blue flannel shirt, the top of a tipsy lighthouse tower pricked in red India ink—an ornament in which Captain Brimblecomb gloried. He liked to wear his shirts open at the throat, so that this work of art might not be entirely withheld from the admiring gaze of Hermit Island—more especially of young Hermit Island. For the old recluse had never seen it, and Mr. Rexford had evinced so little interest in the exhibition that the captain had indignantly refrained from the customary courtesy of rolling up his sleeves and displaying his brawny arms, blazoned over in red and blue with ships, icebergs and compasses, besides seals, polar bears and various marine animals whose precise identity the liberal genius of the artist had left undetermined. The captain had, moreover, an anchor pricked in blue on the back of his left wrist and a starry flag on his right.

“Queer, aint it, Blue-eyes,” he said to Del in a husky whisper, “that Baby should take to Dolo so? Not that there’s any reason why she should not, bless you,” the gallant captain added, hastily;

"only Dolo's a bit offish, like a whale with a harpoon in him, and it's risky steering for most of us in her waters."

"Dolo is always nice with Baby," said Del, not without an effort.

"Gentle as a summer sea," puffed the captain, cordially; "and that reminds me of an adventure of mine, rather curious, down there among the South Sea Islands, thirty odd years ago. You wouldn't like to hear it now, would you?"

"Yes, I would, Cap'n Noll," responded Del, promptly, but with less enthusiasm than usual. In their little world, it was a rare experience for her to see her sister preferred before herself, and it hurt her with a stinging prick, which she did not understand. She watched Dolo and Baby Merry with a puzzled look, lending but an indifferent ear to the captain, who, strutting up and down the piazza, his weather-stained face brightening with each turn which brought him again fronting the sea, was fluently reeling off one of his innumerable tales of personal prowess on the deep. But as Dolo and the baby, walking hand in hand, disappeared around the corner of the house, Del brought her attention, with a guilty start, back to the story-teller.

"And so," he was saying, in the deep, growling tone which always marked the recital of some

episode wherein his redoubted valor had played a conspicuous part, "so when I saw those brown fellers swarming over the vessel's side, I never stopped to give the alarm, but I just snatched up a cutlass and went for 'em, slashing right and left, one man against two or three hundred. Slash? How I did slash! Every stroke cut clean through a knot o' those twisting brown bodies. They fell by dozens. They jumped over the side by scores. The boards under my feet swam in blood, so that I was hard put to it to keep my footing. The water below was full of drowning natives. In five minutes, single-handed, in five minutes I had cleared that deck."

"O-li-ver Crom-well Brim-ble-*comb*!" exclaimed a rebuking voice from the hall, and the rosy, wrinkled face of the captain's fat little wife looked out of the open door.

The captain waved her back with imperious majesty.

"But as I wiped the hacked stump of that cutlass, I was as cool as I had ever been in my life. 'Have a ship of his own? The devil he shall!' That was what the head owner said, when the story came home to him. 'Don't talk to me of his youth. A youngster of that mettle is a sight fitter to give orders than to take 'em.' And for the thirty odd years since," concluded the captain,

triumphantly, "for the thirty odd years since—goin' on forty—with me to live is to command."

At this inopportune moment Baby Merry trotted around the corner of the house, slowly followed by Dolo. Baby climbed up on the piazza, carrying in one small hand a snail-shell filled with sea-water. Her brown eyes sparkled with enterprise, and determination was manifest in the tread of the stubby little shoes.

"Gramp, you lie down on your back, now," she cried. The towering figure of the ocean hero seemed suddenly to collapse.

"Not now, Baby," he pleaded, glancing deprecatingly toward Del and Dolo.

"Now," repeated Baby Merry, with emphasis, stamping her tiny foot; "I'm playin' that you're my sweet little boy, my little Nolly, an' you're sickie, dear little Nolly, an' must take this med'-cine nicely to please mamma."

"Well, well! only don't make me drink that horrid stuff," begged the poor captain, stretching out his elephantine bulk somewhat sheepishly on the piazza floor.

"Hush!" said Baby Merry, sternly; "not one word. Just mind your mamma, little Nolly, you horrid, wicked, awful little child, or I'll stand you in the corner," and perching herself, by a vigorous scramble, astride the mighty chest, she persisted

in emptying the contents of the snail-shell into her grandfather's twisting and protesting mouth.

Del broke into laughter, in which Grandma Brimblecomb joined, her fat sides shaking like jelly, while Dolo's eyes shone with a gleam that was more sarcastic than mirthful. The captain choked over his dose and coughed violently, the baby meanwhile jouncing gleefully up and down upon his chest.

"Take her off," he called, between his gasps; "Baby, get down off poor gramp, quick."

"I won't," said Baby Merry, with sweet distinctness, her lips parted in a roguish smile that displayed the twinkling rows of little white teeth, while the brown eyes danced with mischief.

"Get off at once," roared her grandfather, in the voice that had frightened the tempests.

"No, I won't," repeated Baby, in cherubic tones.

But the grandmother, wiping her eyes, started, still shaking, to the rescue of the discomfited giant. Baby Merry, seeing this ally approaching, gave her grandpa's grizzled beard a parting tweak and jumped hastily down from her triumphant eminence, sending back over her shoulder, as she scampered out of sight, the nonchalant farewell—

"I was 'bout tired o' that play, anyhow. That's the why I got down, grandma. Guess I'll go and

play with Mr. Ocean now. You bring Mr. Monk, Dolo. 'By, gramp.'

Cap'n Noll rose slowly, rubbing his chest and coughing reproachfully, but nevertheless eying with irrepressible pride the small figure of his grandchild trotting off down the beach. Grandma Brimblecomb bustled about with a belated show of wifely devotion, dusting off the captain's broad back with her apron and rising on tiptoe, during the operation, to smile at the girls over his shoulders. But Del and Dolo soon took their leave and started after Baby Merry, Dolo carrying Mr. Monk under her arm.

This last member of the Brimblecomb family should by no means be passed over without introduction. He was, in the eyes of Baby Merry, at least, the most important personage, next to her diminutive self, upon the island. As his name indicates, Mr. Monk was a doll half way between man and monkey. In character he was meek and long-suffering to a fault, but in personal appearance he was hideous. His exceedingly brown skin was fashioned of rough cotton flannel. He was flashily dressed in red jacket with dogshead brass buttons, red cap and pantalettes, and a black skirt, beneath which hung dejectedly down two bare brown feet and a long brown tail. His garments were much the worse for an active life,

exposure to the weather and demonstrative affection. His features, consisting principally of cotton flannel nose, but subordinately of red worsted mouth and button eyes, wore a singularly villainous expression. In proportion as his little mistress idolized him, he was detested by all her friends, and between too much love and too little, Mr. Monk's lot was a hard one. On this occasion Dolo carried him upside down, as a convenient method of venting her animosity. This exposed Mr. Monk to harrowing anxiety, for Major, a shaggy old Newfoundland, the only four-footed retainer of the Brimblecomb estate, cherished an especial grudge against the poor doll, and now, having slipped out from under the piazza to escort the girls on their way to school, twice so far forgot his dignity, while he was stalking along beside Dolo, as to snap at Mr. Monk's red cap.

Del ran on in advance of her sister, calling and whistling to Major. Dolo smiled her not altogether pleasant smile and gave the dog's black head a stroke. He looked after Del uneasily, then wagged his tail and kept close to Dolo's side. The puzzled look came into Del's blue eyes again, as she turned and surveyed the group. Dolo glanced toward the bright little figure of Baby Merry, who, down by the water's edge, was dig-

ging vigorously with a large clam-shell in the sand. Then she bent over Major, throwing one arm about his shaggy neck and holding Mr. Monk, whose button orbs stared helplessly into the angry eyes of the dog, to Major's mouth.

"Take him to Baby, sir," Dolo commanded, in clear, cold tones.

Every hair on Major's body seemed to rise in repugnance. He growled, and his white teeth looked as if they would tear Mr. Monk into cotton flannel bits.

"Don't hurt him," said Dolo, sternly; "take him to Baby, quick."

"He'll not do it," called Del; "it's no use trying."

"You see," retorted Dolo.

And to Del's astonishment, the dog presently extended his head, took Mr. Monk's black skirt in a gingerly fashion between his teeth, looked up into Dolo's eyes for moral support, gave a little undergrowl of final protest and raced off across the beach to Baby Merry, before whose feet he dropped his odious burden, not a shred of Mr. Monk's finery nor a feature of Mr. Monk's expressive countenance, the worse.

"Good dog!" called Dolo; "now stay and take care of Baby."

With an air of resignation, Major stretched

himself upon the wet sand between his small charge and the surf. Dolo laughed and clambered after Del up the low bluff, the girls turning their steps toward a third house, larger than the others and standing back from the water upon the higher ground.

"It was mean in you to make Major carry Mr. Monk, when you know how he hates him," said Del, with an unwonted flash of her blue eyes.

Dolo laughed again and shrugged her left shoulder.

"Major's devoted to you, and that's the very reason why you like to torment him," added Del, almost angrily.

Dolo continued to laugh.

The dwelling which the girls were now nearing had something of the appearance of a small farmhouse. Starting out in life as a summer cottage, it had taken on a long addition, which was apparently given over to kitchen and dairy purposes. Milk-pans were sunning upon a rude bench beside one of the numerous back doors; three Devon cows, well known to the children of the island as Bessie, Jessie and Old Susannah, were grazing in a sandy pasture near by; a flock of awkward Brahmapootra hens were industriously scratching and pecking in a slatted enclosure; an old cat, Frisk, who had long since outgrown the signifi-

cance of a name bestowed in his far-away days of kittenhood, was dozing in a patch of catnip; Eric Yorke was hoeing in a vegetable garden behind the house; Robert, with a hayfork in his hand, was standing in the door of a rough-boarded barn, talking earnestly with Nathan; and Mrs. Yorke, her fourth and youngest son, little Nick, tagging her every step, was moving about among her flowers. For in the waste-land on the seaward side of the house a space had been cleared among the grass and weeds, and here were displayed flower-beds in circles, squares and oblongs, all fringed by the fresh green and white of sweet alyssum, this surrounded by still another border, sometimes of small white stones, sea-polished till they glittered in the morning sun, and sometimes of clam-shells, as nearly as possible of a size, the convexity uppermost and the broad edge turned outward. Here blossomed yellow marigolds, elfin-faced pansies, bright-winged, airy-hearted sweet-peas, petunias, verbenas and nunlike mignonnette, with the inevitable geranium. Mrs. Yorke, holding back her calico skirts from the dewy leaves, was a thin, stooping woman, once fair and blithesome, but now with silvered hair, drooping mouth and a look of settled disappointment in eyes of faded blue.

“Oh, Aunt Marion!” called Del, breathlessly,

from the top of the bluff, "is Uncle Maurice going to keep school to-day?"

"You must ask him," replied Mrs. Yorke, lifting her head with a weary gesture.

Little Nick, a frail, serious-faced child five or six years of age, nestled his cheek against the worn hand he clasped in both his own, and peeped out at the girls demurely from the shelter of his mother's skirts.

Eric threw down his hoe with a boyish shout and came running from the garden. Robert strolled across from the barn, slowly followed by Nathan. Bessie and Jessie came to the bars and reached their red noses over, expecting a handful or two of clover—expectations which Del hastened to fulfill. Old Susannah turned her lazy head with a moo of welcome. The greedy hens were alone indifferent, for even Frisk winked one sleepy eye, and Uncle Maurice, a pen in his hand, leaned out of an upper window.

"School? Yes, my dears!" he said, cheerily. "It's fine weather for brains. Come up, all of you, and let's see what we would like to learn this sunshiny morning."

CHAPTER III.

SCHOOL.

The best that we can do for one another is to exchange our thoughts freely.—JAMES ANTHONY FROUDE.

UNCLE MAURICE was assuredly the queerest of schoolmasters. This proposition admits of a threefold proof. In the first place, he would accept no salary; in the second, he gave as many holidays as he kept school-days; and in the third, he taught his scholars only what they desired to know. In regard to the first point, Uncle Maurice had been heard to say, in refusing the fee which Mr. Rexford tendered him for the tutoring of the two girls, that there was no rightful connection between money and wisdom—that the true and the beautiful in science were no more to be bartered for dollars than blue sky or sweet air or love itself. “The best is ever a gift,” he said; “it cannot be bought and sold.” In regard to the second point, Uncle Maurice claimed that holidays were holy days, with life and nature,

mirth and wonder, for teachers, and that a mere human pedagogue, like himself, was but a poor substitute for these. "No, no," he would make answer to the children, when they flocked about him, begging for school, "the books are shut to-day, but earth and heaven are open. Run wild! Run wild! It is God who teaches best." In regard to the third point, Uncle Maurice, when questioned upon it, was wont to laugh softly, as if to himself, and reply in metaphor that none but a hungry man could be depended upon to digest a dinner. So take him all in all, it must be conceded that this was an eccentric dominie.

Yet it was pleasant to hear the joyous rush of young feet up the stairs in response to his summons. It was good to see the gladness flashing from the eyes of these fresh-hearted students, who had not yet learned to associate study with anything but privilege and inspiration. Del and Eric led the van, Nat and Dolo followed, and Robert, with Nick on his shoulder, brought up the rear.

Uncle Maurice's study, through whose door the boys and girls surged impetuously, was a long, low chamber, its walls lined with books whose arrangement would have been the despair of a librarian. Here, for example, was a case labeled Poetry, yet containing Ruskin's Complete Works, Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus*, Amiel's *Journal*, and

many another volume guiltless of verse, while on the shelves marked English Prose stood, with a somewhat shamefaced expression, Young's *Night Thoughts*, Blair's *Grave* and—yes, the immortal Pope himself. Then, who ever heard of classifying essays under such heads as *Whispers*, *Echoes*, *Trumpetings*, *Buzz* and *Cackle*? Or of arranging novelists as *Brook-Natures*, *River-Natures*, *Ditch-Natures*, *Cistern-Natures*, *Fountain-Natures*, *Lake-Natures* and *Sea-Natures*? And the worst of it was that the key to this enigmatical catalogue existed nowhere save in Uncle Maurice's head. The young people cherished a profound reverence for their schoolmaster's library, and, easy as his discipline was, no boy or girl of them all ever took down a book from a shelf without his express permission.

For the rest, the room held a narrow couch, with an army-blanket thrown across it, a desk which seemed all pigeon-holes, a long table strewn with books and papers, dictionary stands, newspaper racks, scrap-baskets and all the varied paraphernalia of a writer-student's sanctum. In a well-worn Sleepy Hollow reclined Uncle Maurice, the morning sunlight bringing out into clear view the silver threads in his brown hair, the wrinkles across the spacious forehead and the irresolute lines about the mouth; but the loving eyes of his

scholars, who were, except for Del and Dolo, his children as well, heeded nothing save the smile of greeting on the friendly lips and in the fatherly eyes.

Even Dolo, who, alone of all the little flock, was prone to pass judgment on her master in her thoughts, had never a disloyal heart-beat toward him in the presence of his books. For here the illustrious dead, the truth-seekers and beauty-lovers of the great past, cast the mantle of their majesty around this lonely man, who had loved them better than he had loved his own fame or fortune. And here Dolo stood smitten with a deeper awe than the rest, her dark eyes wide and wistful, watching the sunlight as it blessed with the same golden touch the ranks of volumned shelves and the quiet figure in the chair, and listening, with a strange sense of a harmony just beyond her reach, to the hoarse time-murmur of the ocean.

But Del and Eric had bestowed themselves on hassocks drawn up close to the master's seat, Nick had run to his customary station between his father's knees, Nat had perched himself at ungainly length on a high writing-stool, and Robert was handing Dolo a chair. "Why don't you keep it yourself?" asked Dolo, accepting the courtesy with an ungraciousness that was in real-

ity a form of shyness. Robert laughed and remained leaning on the back of the chair, while Mr. Yorke proceeded to open school.

For a few moments the master sat motionless, a reverie gathering in his eyes. Then he reached out one hand to the nearest shelf, drew down a book, turned the leaves lightly and read slowly and impressively, while his young audience hearkened with reverent faces —

“‘A self-denial, no less austere than the saint’s’ is demanded of the scholar. He must worship truth, and forego all things for that, and choose defeat and pain, so that his treasure in thought is thereby augmented. God offers to every mind its choice between truth and repose. Take which you please — you can never have both.”

The master closed the volume.

“Eric, my son, what have you heard?”

Eric’s frank face flushed crimson. “Honest and true, papa, I’m awfully ashamed. I’m always doing this, but I never will again. And indeed I heard some of it. I heard that a scholar must be just as good as a saint, because truth is a sort of religion, and then — then — the sunlight got into Del’s hair — and — and there was something about worshiping, and then the sea sounded so loud I didn’t hear the rest.”

Mr. Yorke shook his head, smiling nevertheless.

less. "The wandering thought seldom brings riches home," he said, and turned to Del, who repeated the passage without the slip of a single word.

"But I don't understand it," she added. "Why can't we have truth and repose both?"

"Who wants repose, anyhow?" asked Nat, scornfully.

"I do," announced Dolo, with startling emphasis; "that's all I want truth for—repose."

"I want truth for truth," rejoined Nat, half angrily; "I'd be ashamed to want it for anything else."

"What is truth?" asked little Nick, the old, old question falling with strange effect from his childish lips. "Is it something inside people, papa, or something outside people? Can't I have it?"

"Some day, please God," answered Mr. Yorke, gently, stroking the small round head, "and some day repose with it, but not here. Not truth in repose, now or ever, but some day repose in truth. And it will be without us, all about us, like the air, and within us, like our own breath of being."

"Yes, papa, I understand," said little Nick.

But the elder scholars still had problems in their uplifted eyes, while one after another they

repeated the strong words over, until each had the passage securely committed to memory.

“And now I must be off,” said Robert, cheerily. “But this has given me something to think about in the hayfield.”

Mr. Yorke’s brow clouded over.

“Must you go, Robert?” he asked, wistfully. “What is hay?”

“That’s not half as hard a question as Nick’s,” commented Dolo.

“Well, sir,” said Robert, with his sunny smile, “it’s breakfast and dinner and supper to the cattle all the winter long, for one thing. I’m afraid I must go. No, Nat, I don’t want you, old fellow. Can’t let you eclipse your genius under a straw hat this morning. I believe in economy of forces. You’re the best head at the books, and I’m the best hand at the scythe. And Eric, you fraud, you needn’t make believe you’re coming. You’ve not the least notion of it.”

“He’s afraid the sun would tan his bonny skin,” suggested Del, saucily.

Eric retorted by a grimace and readily sank again upon the hassock from which he had made a feeble pretense of rising. Nat’s conscience, however, was not so easily quieted.

“You always go, Rob,” he protested, swaying uneasily upon the high stool; “you always”—

Robert glanced warningly toward their father, and Nat, coloring, stammered and broke off.

"You can help me a while after dinner," said Robert, in his good-natured fashion, "and so shall this young lazybones, too," giving Eric a slight, fraternal kick. "You'll please excuse me, father? Good-by, girls."

A shadow seemed to fall upon the room with Robert's departure. The sunshine forsook Del's tresses, Nat's eyes dropped before Dolo's quick, critical glance, and little Nick, feeling the chill in the atmosphere, began to fidget between his father's knees.

"Run back to your mother and her flower-beds, Nick," said Mr. Yorke, releasing the child; "outdoors is far the best school-room for pale-cheeked little boys."

"Mamma's back in the kitchen by this time," remarked Nick, slowly withdrawing; "but maybe I'll be a comfort to her, and maybe she'll give me a cinnamon stick."

Mr. Yorke passed his hand across his forehead and sighed heavily.

"Hayfield! kitchen!" he murmured, "and my own son! my own wife!"

The master's train of thought was so evidently becoming painful that Del, with her quick perception, reached up and touched his hand.

“Don’t send the rest of us away, please, Uncle Maurice. We want school all the week long. We’ve had so many holidays this summer. And we want to see the new books that came last night.”

“Oh, yes; the new books!” echoed Dolo, eagerly, springing to her feet.

At the mention of books Mr. Yorke became, for better or for worse, himself again. He rose from his chair with an eagerness almost equal to Dolo’s and lifted an opened newspaper that covered one corner of the table.

But before the children were able to lay their hands upon the volumes so disclosed, the master dropped the covering again and stood a moment erect, with the look upon his face as of a man saying grace before meat. What he did say was this—

“Listen to the words of Milton: ‘A good book is the precious life-blood of a master spirit, embalmed and treasured up on purpose to a life beyond life.’”

Then he removed the paper once more.

“Come, Del,” he said, smilingly, with a change of tone, “come and tell us which is whose.”

Del came forward with a gleeful little skip, and, catching up the books in her arms, gave them a rapturous hug. Then she dropped upon the floor

with the new treasures in her lap and proceeded to turn them over and over in an excited hunt after titles.

"But there are only six," she exclaimed; "somebody's left out."

"Yes," said Uncle Maurice, sorrowfully, "there is none for Robert. The one I sent for, the bookseller did not have."

"Poor old Rob!" remarked Eric, "he always gets cheated out of his share of things. It's a shame."

"Then mind you show up in the hayfield this afternoon, if you feel so bad about Rob," growled Nat, noticing how the cloud had returned to his father's brow at Eric's thoughtless words.

"Well, I'm sure of one book!" announced Del; "this *Age of Fable* is for me and it's the very prettiest and nicest book of all. Oh, I'm so pleased, Uncle Maurice!"

"How do you know it's for you?" demanded Dolo.

"Why, it's a mythology book, all make-believes, and so it never could be for you," retorted Del. "Oh, here's a picture of An—An"—

"Andromeda?" suggested Uncle Maurice.

"Oh, yes; of Andromeda way out on a rock in the ocean," cried Del, enthusiastically, "with a horrid big sea-monster opening his jaws at her."

And oh! there's a flying hero coming right down on him through the air. We'll play that when we're in bathing, Eric."

"What's my book?" asked Dolo, sharply.

"Yours? Oh, yes!" responded Del, cuddling her own against her cheek and then laying it tenderly down by her side. "Now let me see. I always was a good guesser. Here's a stupid big book on Political Economy. Take it, Nat. It's all full of columns of ugly figures—just what you like. And ah, oh! here's Hans Christian Andersen's Fairy-Tales. How nice it looks! Isn't that for me, too, Uncle Maurice?"

"Not much," laughed Eric; "that's for one of the kids."

"Del always expects the lion's share," said Dolo.

"As if a tawny mane made a lion!" observed Nat, quietly, casting a glance from the pages of his new book upon the red gold of Del's rippling tresses.

"Oh, it must be for Baby Merry!" cried Del, unheeding these various comments. "What fun we shall have! Nick will read her the stories, as solemn as a small minister, and then she will tell them all over again to herself in her own funny little way. And here's a book for Nick—Outline Maps. Now we shall have Europe and Asia

drawn all over the sand, and we can travel in foreign countries without once going off Hermit Island."

"But give me mine," insisted Dolo, with a dangerous gleam in her black eyes.

"Well, take your choice," replied Del, holding out a shapely red-bound book in one hand and a stubby, mottled little volume in the other; "here is Darwin on Earth-Worms and here is Sir John Mandeville's Travels. Which'll you have?"

"She won't have Sir John," exclaimed Eric, leaping upon the prize with a whoop of triumph; "the books of travel are for your Uncle Tommy every time."

"Really, Eric," remarked Del, demurely, "your behavior would disgrace a porpoise. But what I want to know is, why Uncle Maurice should give Dolo a book about worms—dirty, wriggly, nasty angle-worms!" And Del wrinkled up her pretty nose with an expression of supreme disgust.

But Dolo looked up into her master's eyes, smiling brightly, and Uncle Maurice smiled back.

"My book isn't lies," said Dolo.

"Neither is mine," protested Nat.

"Nor mine," chimed in Eric.

"I don't think mine is, really and truly. Is it, Uncle Maurice?" pleaded Del.

"Well, we will see," said the master. "Take

Nat's book, for instance. Nat's book is made up of so-called facts, selected and grouped, and of conclusions drawn from these facts. Now if the observation of the author was accurate, if his sources of information were reliable, if the selection is representative and the grouping fair, then there is a chance that the conclusions may in some degree stand for the truth, though even then, my son, you must make due allowance for the writer's personal stand-point—his heredity, training, social prejudice, intellectual limit and the object he has in view."

"Sorry for you, Nat," observed Eric, cheerfully.
"Isn't my book truer than that, papa?"

"Let me see," said the father, and, reaching out his hand for Eric's volume, he turned the leaves for a moment and then read aloud a few passages, chosen almost at random—

“‘And in that isle there is a great wonder, for all kinds of fish that are in the sea come once a year, one kind after the other, to the coast of that isle in so great a multitude that a man can see hardly anything but fish; and there they remain three days; and every man of the country takes as many of them as he likes. And that kind of fish, after the third day, departs and goes into the sea. And after them come another multitude of fish of another kind, and do in the same manner

as the first did another three days; and so on with the other kinds, till all the divers kinds of fishes have been there, and men have taken what they like of them. And no man knows the cause; but they of the country say that it is to do reverence to their king, who is the most worthy king in the world, and that is best beloved of God, as they say. There are also in that country a kind of snails, so great that many persons may lodge in their shells, as men would do in a little house. . . . After that isle, men go by the Sea of Ocean, by many isles, to a great and fair isle called Nacumera, which is in circuit more than a thousand miles. And all the men and women of that isle have dogs' heads. Hence men go to another isle called Silha, which is full eight hundred miles in circuit. . . . In that isle is a great mountain, in the midst of which is a large lake in a full, fair plain, and there is great plenty of water. And they of the country say that Adam and Eve wept on that mount a hundred years, when they were driven out of Paradise. And the water, they say, is of their tears; for so much water they wept, that made the aforesaid lake. And at the bottom of that lake are found many precious stones and great pearls. . . . And the king of that country, once every year, gives leave to poor men to go into the lake to

gather precious stones and pearls, by way of alms, for the love of God, that made Adam. . . . In one of these isles are people of great stature, like giants, hideous to look upon; and they have but one eye, which is in the middle of the forehead; and they eat nothing but raw flesh and fish. And in another isle toward the south, dwell people of foul stature and cursed nature, who have no heads, but their eyes are in their shoulders. In another isle are people who have the face all flat, without nose and without mouth. In another isle are people that have the lip above the mouth so great, that when they sleep in the sun they cover all the face with that lip. And in another isle" —

But Eric could restrain himself no longer. "Jeminy Crackets!" he exclaimed; "but if that don't beat our island all hollow! Jingo! What yarns!"

"What do you think of your old book now?" asked Del, disdainfully.

"Want to swap?" suggested Nat, holding up his bulky volume with a look of restored respect.

"It sounds like Cap'n Noll," was Dolo's sententious criticism.

"If you were all boys, I'd tell you all to shut up," responded Eric, stoutly, but lifting puzzled eyes to his father's face.

“Don’t lose faith in your book, my boy,” said Mr. Yorke, in answer to the eyes. “It was written in the old, old times, when wisdom went by hearsay, and even in later days many’s the honest man who has been gulled. By the time you have read the book and are ready to tell us about it, you will understand better how, in spite of the marvels, it sprang from one of the most candid and truth-loving hearts God ever made.”

“Oh, are we going to teach each other our books?” asked Del, “just as we did last time?”

“Yes,” said the master. “How can we help it? By next Monday I expect you’ll be so brimming over with Greek mythology that we shall have to let you talk to us about it the morning long, until we are all eager to get hold of your new book, too. And by Wednesday Eric will have to tell us about Sir John Mandeville’s adventures, or”—

“Or burst,” suggested Nat.

“And by the week after,” continued Mr Yorke, “Nat will feel it borne in upon him that he must enlighten our minds on economic questions, and Dolo”—

“Will have a menagerie of wretched little worms all ready for exhibition,” concluded Del.

“As if everybody didn’t know everything about worms already!” observed Eric, with a lofty air,

his temper not yet entirely recovered from the onslaught upon his book. "Useless things!"

"Since you are so wise in regard to these useless things, suppose you instruct us a little," suggested his father, quietly. "Are worms terrestrial animals or aquatic?"

"Why, worms are—worms," replied Eric, in some embarrassment.

"Terrestrial, of course," volunteered Nat, who was of a logical turn of mind; "we call 'em earth-worms, not water-worms."

"Yet if you should keep one in the dry air of a room for a single day, it would die," said Mr. Yorke, "while it would live for three or four months in a bowl of water."

"Let's try it and see," proposed Dolo.

"Don't you believe my father?" demanded Nat, with one of his sudden flashes of anger.

"He doesn't want me to," replied Dolo, calmly; "he would rather have me try and see."

Mr. Yorke smiled assent. Then he turned again to Eric and resumed his catechism.

"How do worms breathe?"

"Through their noses," replied Eric, recklessly.

"Pooh!" said Del, "a worm's not of enough account to have a nose."

"Oh, don't be too hard on your fellow-mortals," protested Nat, who had loyally gone over to the

side his father seemed to be espousing ; "a worm has some dignity of its own, after all. A trodden worm will turn."

" Didn't say it wouldn't," retorted Del ; " I only said it wouldn't turn up its nose, and it won't, because it hasn't any. So there ! "

" They breathe by their skins," announced Dolo, who had availed herself of this interval to search her book for the answer. " Oh ! and they see by their skins, too. They haven't any eyes or ears, but they'll crawl into their holes, if you bring a candle, and they'll run away, if you play on the piano. Aren't they interesting ? "

" Pshaw ! " growled Eric ; " worms interesting ! "

" Why do they pave the little chambers at the bottom of their burrows with bits of stone and with seeds and rose-thorns ? " began Mr. Yorke, again.

" Didn't know they did," said Eric, indifferently.

" And why do they coat the upper part of their burrows with leaves ? " pursued the questioner.

" Do they, though ? " returned Eric, with languid interest.

" Why do they plug up the mouths of their burrows with sticks and stones ? " continued Mr. Yorke, a twinkle in his eye disputing the gravity about his mouth.

" Seems cozy, maybe," hazarded Eric.

"Why do they keep their tails fixed in their burrows when they walk out to take the air?"

"Oh, come off! You're fooling," exclaimed Eric. "I'm going to look the very next chance I get and see if they do."

"Well said. Now answer me one more question. When the worms burrow holes, what do they do with the earth?"

"Swallow it, I reckon," said Eric, growing desperate.

"Right, my son," replied his father, to Eric's undisguised astonishment; "sometimes they push it away, but more often they swallow it."

"Every worm his own wheel-barrow," murmured Nat.

"They swallow earth in large quantities," continued Mr. Yorke; "and also bits of stone, grains of sand, and sharp fragments of brick and tile."

"What for?" asked Eric, his eyes shining at last.

"Ah! Now the questioning is on the right side," said the teacher, smiling the well-pleased smile the scholars loved. "These hard, angular fragments are to aid their busy gizzards in crushing and grinding the earth, for it is estimated that in many parts of England on every acre of land a weight of more than ten tons of earth annually passes through the bodies of worms

and is brought to the surface, so that the whole superficial bed of vegetable mould is ploughed and sifted by them for us in the course of a few years. They are the friends of the archæologists, too, preserving old walls and pavements by burying them with mould and thus protecting them from decay. These faithful little laborers prepare our soil for vegetation, keep our lawns smooth and beautiful, and in fact, carry on a large share of the work of the world and play an important part in its history."

"And you call them useless things, Eric!" said Del, as reproachfully as if she had been the most ardent champion of worms from the beginning.

In the face of this roundabout desertion, poor Eric was unable to hold his ground.

"I'll take it back," he said, meekly; "I always liked 'em pretty well for bait, and now"—

"Now we ought to give them nothing short of the right of suffrage, in return for their valuable services. They're better adapted to political polls than fish-poles," remarked Nat, with an expression of such peculiar gravity it was made manifest that he was jesting. Eric groaned, but Del laughed out, adding with girlish condescension—

"You're a queer boy, Nat. You're so absent-minded and bookish and all, and yet beneath it you do have a sort of dry wit of your own."

"Dry!" muttered Eric; "I should think so. Chestnuts!"

"What would become of this island," retorted Nat, "if we didn't have that fellow to fool around over on the coast, once a week, and pick up in the streets—while Rob and I are buying groceries and attending to our business like respectable citizens—all the slang of the nineteenth century?"

Mr. Yorke would have suffered the young people's banter to run on until noon, but Dolo cut short this irrelevant discussion by one of her crisp remarks—

"I like my book, Uncle Maurice. I'll study it hard and dig up some worms of my own and try its experiments all over on them. Then I can tell you about worms for sure, week after next."

"Give us a corrected edition of Darwin, eh?" asked Nat. "I'll help you dig. It's getting to be quite an honorable distinction to be a 'poor worm of the dust'. Del's gods and goddesses are nowhere now."

Del pouted and pulled beseechingly, with one of her childish, winsome gestures, at Uncle Maurice's sleeve.

"Please tell how my book is true," she pleaded.

Uncle Maurice slowly leaned back in his chair, turning his head so as the better to watch the

white clouds drifting across the azure background of the summer sky.

“We have a poet who once wrote—

“Through pastures blue the flocks of God go trooping one by one,

And turn their golden fleeces round to dry them in the sun.”

“Is that true or false?” he asked.

And the boys and girls, following his gaze, answered with one voice—“True.”

“What is the Greek name of the sun-god?” asked the master, after a moment’s silence.

“Apollo,” replied Del.

“Phœbus,” replied Nat.

“Both right,” said the master. “One of these days, when you are all coaxing to have me teach you the most beautiful language ever spoken by mortal lips, I will show you how it comes to pass that the word Apollo means Destroyer. Yes, the golden arrows of the keen-eyed Archer sometimes smite mortals with black death. Look at this photograph of Niobe, clasping her last little daughter to her heart. The Archer-God, proud and swift to wrath, has slain with seven bright arrows her seven beautiful sons, and his sister, the Moon-Goddess—

“Queen and Huntress chaste and fair”—

having pierced with her silver arrows six of the seven daughters, is already raising her bow of pearl to rob the grief-distracted mother of her last. But we love the sun better when he is not the pitiless Apollo, but Phœbus, the Shining One, the divine Poet, who floods the listening sky with ethereal music that only earth's highest mountain-tops may catch, those Parnassus peaks which mortal singers climb with bleeding feet to drink in the enchantment of his song. And Phœbus is the bright-robed Shepherd, too, whose white flocks wander softly through the violet fields of heaven. Del's book tells us all this and it tells us the story of how once upon a time a mischievous child stole away Apollo's herds, for the Greeks thought of their stately southern cumuli as herds of white heifers rather than sheep. And the story is true, isn't it? Listen."

But the boys and girls, listening, heard above the monotony of the sea nothing save the whistling of the wind.

Mr. Yorke quoted again—

“‘The babe was born at the first peep of day;
He began playing on the lyre at noon,
And that same evening did he steal away
Apollo's herds.’

“Who is it?”

Mr. Yorke fixed his glance, inquiring, inspiring, upon Dolo, who was the skeptic among his pupils as regarded the truth of poetry.

Dolo's dark eyes suddenly kindled and she looked up into the master's face with her rare, transforming smile.

"The wind! It's the wind!" she exclaimed. "It is so little at first, and grows to be a great wind so fast, and it makes a music, too, and sometimes blows the clouds away."

"Right!" said Mr. Yorke, with an accent that made the happy color mount into Dolo's cheeks.

"Thank you, Do," said Del, gaily; "you're the one who said my book was lies, and you're the one to make it truth. I'll call it even."

"What was the classic name for the wind?" asked Nat.

Mr. Yorke sighed.

"Does any one remember what *merx* means in Latin?" he asked.

Apparently no one did, and it required a moment or two of patient work with English derivatives before Mr. Yorke could bring his little class to see that the word signified merchandise.

"I like to hear Uncle Maurice open a word," said Dolo.

"So do I," said Eric; "he cracks it like a nut."

"Peels it like an onion, you'd better say," corrected Nat.

"No, no; he unfolds it like a rosebud," protested Del.

"But notice, my children," said the master. "The Greek name of the wind-god is Hermes, which means interpreter; for to the sensitive soul of the Greek the whispers of the wind were messages from Heaven. But the Romans—material-minded, blind of heart—knew Hermes by the name of Mercury, because they saw in the wind only an agent to fill the sails of their ships and advance their selfish commerce. But woe to the nation, woe to the man that craves no other celestial greeting than the assurance of external prosperity! What can the Olympians give to those who turn their grace to degradation? And speaking of the Romans," added Mr. Yorke, presently, in a lighter tone, "what a long time it is since we have had an hour with our old friend, Virgil! Where were we?"

"At the beginning of the fifth book," replied Nat, promptly, while Eric dived under the couch for the disreputable little pile of grammars and *Æneids*, all tattered and torn, which looked as if they had seen active service as ammunition against the giant, Ignorance.

So the boys and girls gathered still closer about

the master, while he, reading the Latin, translating and commenting, carried them smoothly over the first one hundred lines. Then the questions grew more frequent and one after another the scholars found themselves quite naturally taking up the reading or translation, until at last, when they had reached the most exciting crisis of the boat-race, Mr. Yorke withdrew his help altogether and left the eager young intelligences to push on through the story as best they might without him. Meanwhile, Nick had wandered back with a long cinnamon stick in his hand, which his father, coaxing from him and breaking into bits, used as the material for a lesson on the table of sixes, Nick devouring the fragments as he advanced in knowledge.

As the last brittle morsel of all disappeared between the childish lips, a dinner-bell was rung below stairs, and the school, amid many exclamations of surprise and regret, broke up without ceremony.

“What shall we have to-morrow?” asked Nat.
“History?”

“Geography!” shouted Eric.

“No. Shakespeare!” pleaded Del.

“Seaweeds!” urged Dolo.

“A holiday,” pronounced Mr. Yorke. And his wife, overhearing him, sighed impatiently and said

in fretful tones to Robert, who, flushed and tired, was just in from the hayfield—"You boys will grow up in utter ignorance. I don't see what your father is thinking of. No good can possibly come of such helter-skelter work."

CHAPTER IV.

FORTUNE-TELLING.

Jesters do oft prove prophets.—WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE.

WHY don't you ever go into the surf, Miss Lucas?" asked Del, gaily, as she ran through the house an hour after dinner in her bathing suit—a monastic-looking costume made over from one of the gray flannel frocks.

Miss Lucas slowly lifted her glance from the basket of mending with which she was busied.

"It never occurred to me," she answered.

Del's blue eyes peeped at her wistfully from under their long brown lashes. It was so essentially the nature of the child to let her love overflow freely on all with whom she came in contact, that she suffered more than she herself realized from the repression of her home affections. Her father rebuffed every approach; Dolo, when she was not freakishly tormenting, was silent and strange, and Miss Lucas seemed to be enfolded

in a mantle of never melting ice. Something in the housekeeper's quiet reply impressed Del as pathetic, and she longed to throw her warm young arms about the passive form and to kiss a flash of color into the unchanging face. But now, as always, an invisible barrier held her back, and with an incoherent phrase or two of exhortation, the girl ran on toward the beach. Miss Lucas did not look after her, nor out upon the gleaming sea, but slowly bent her head again over the basket of mending.

Eric, also in bathing costume, was frisking about upon the shore, waiting for Del. Her first appearance on the top of the bluff was the signal for him to dive into the surf and set about a display of acrobatic feats, which he performed equally to Del's admiration and his own, until a peculiarly energetic billow, perhaps that

“ . . . great third wave
That never a swimmer shall cross or climb,”

struck him at precisely the wrong angle, tipping the vain-glorious athlete upside down and spinning him about on his head in the sand, so that there was left visible to Del's astonished eyes only a pair of sturdy brown legs kicking furiously in the air. After this exploit, Eric was suffi-

ciently crest-fallen to be very good company, and Del waded out to join him. They danced up and down together, chased and splashed each other, ventured into too deep water, were knocked off their feet by a heavy wave, had an instant of struggle and dismay, were rolled back into the shallows by the indulgent tide, scrambled out, coughing and spluttering, upon the beach, where they lay meekly down and let the surf break over them, struck out for deep water once more, because Eric's toe had been bitten by a crab—scampered in again, because Del had trodden on an eel, sang, laughed, shouted and disported themselves in general like the frolicsome young creatures that they were. The gray old ocean seemed in no wise affronted at being thus taken for a gigantic playfellow, but smoothed his rough manners as best he knew, and, however loudly he might roar as he charged upon them, or however fiercely he might shake his hoary locks, proved that his terrible plunges were all in sport by the gentleness with which he would catch the frail bodies in his strong embrace and toss them lightly up and down upon the pulses of his mighty heart.

Dolo was bathing, also, but further up the beach and alone. She had a plank with her and was teaching herself to swim. After a time, she

let her plank float free and waded over toward Del. There was a bar of sand some little distance out, upon which Del was crouching, her loosened mass of golden-red hair clinging about her and her attitude expressive of mortal terror. There seemed to be, however, no adequately exciting cause for this emotion either in the waves that occasionally dashed over the bar or in the innocent flock of sand-peeps that was flying by. Eric, his comely face glowing with exercise, was splashing along toward Del from the shore, flourishing his sleeveless arms about his head in a manner startling to behold.

“Oh, Dolo!” cried Del, catching sight of her sister, “I’m Andromeda and Eric’s Perseus. I’m chained to this rock in the ocean to be devoured by a horrible sea-monster and Perseus has wings so that he can fly out and rescue me. But the trouble is, we haven’t anything nice for a monster. Won’t you be the monster, Dolo dear—please, just for once? And Perseus will slay you and fall in love with me.”

Dolo shrugged her left shoulder with unwonted emphasis.

“No, thank you,” she replied, as dryly as could be expected of a girl standing in a dripping bathing-suit waist-deep in the Atlantic; “but I’ll be Andromeda, if you’ll be the monster.”

“Oh, but”—began Del, in a tone of remonstrance, glancing from her own shining tresses to Dolo’s closely-coiled black braid; “don’t you think that I—that I”—

Dolo laughed her short little laugh and waded back to shore, leaving Perseus to perform miracles of valor upon the skeleton of a skate, that had been conveniently washed up on the bar, while Andromeda, with something between a pout and a quiver of the lip, surveyed the contest. It was well for Dolo that she had declined the role of monster, for Perseus, armed with a big pebble, pounded the skeleton almost into annihilation.

“Ann Dromedary, you are free,” said her deliverer, grandiloquently, his ear for classic names being scarcely equal to his destructive genius, and spurning the bony fragments of the skate into the sea, he flapped his arms aloft and perched upon one foot in an attitude truly suggestive of a winged hero taking flight.

But it is in the nature of delivered maidens to be ungrateful and Andromeda, yawning a little, called back—

“This is getting stupid, Eric. Let’s do something else.”

“What else?” asked Eric, dropping his arms and his uplifted foot with unabated cheerfulness.

“Bring me an armful of the very brightest sea-

weeds you can find and I'll show you," replied Del.

In a few moments Eric was standing before her, his arms heaped high with masses of lustrous brown and vivid green seaweed. Selecting the most brilliant strips, Del wound them about her waist and trailed them over her shoulders, until she bore, at least in Eric's eyes, a striking resemblance to a mermaid.

"Now get me a good big shell," she commanded, "and I'll tell your fortune."

Eric groped about under the waves and brought back the largest snail-shell he could find. It did not altogether satisfy the sibyl, but she smiled graciously on her servitor and placed it against her ear.

"I hear the rolling of waves and the rolling of waves and the rolling of waves," she announced, solemnly; "that means you are to be a sailor and always live on the ocean."

Eric nodded, well content, and threw himself down upon the sand at Del's feet, heedless of the surf that every now and then splashed over him.

It was a singularly charming picture that they made, the fair-faced little maiden, her dripping garments nearly concealed by the sun-glorified abundance of her fallen hair, and by the fantastic draperies of seaweed, and at her feet, the slender

boy, graceful in all his postures and movements, and with a delicacy of outline and coloring rarely seen in a lad so hardily bred.

“I truly mean to be a sailor, when I’m a man,” said Eric, a look new even to Del—a longing, steadfast look shining through all the fun and sparkle of his ever-mischievous blue eyes; “I should love to sail on the ocean always. There is nothing I want so much as that. I don’t believe I could stand it to live inland, out of sight and sound of the sea. For my part, I’m glad our home is on the island. Mother cries about it and Nat says he’s going away, but I like it, and so does father.”

“Does Robert like it?” asked Del, tickling Eric’s ear with a wet bit of seaweed.

Eric made a snatch and captured the seaweed before he answered the question.

“Rob? Oh, I don’t know. Rob’s so close-mouthed, you never can tell what he likes or what he doesn’t. He talks, too,” added Eric, reflectively, “but somehow he doesn’t tell you much about himself. He’s a pretty good sort of fellow, Rob is.”

“It’s easy for some people to be good,” said the mermaid, with a very human little sigh.

“Then let’s leave it all to them,” was Eric’s prompt response.

After this, conversation flagged. Del hummed sailor-songs and Eric whistled the accompaniments. By and by they began to feel chilly and resumed their frolics in the water; but suddenly Eric sprang upright and shaded his eyes with his hand.

"Hello! There's Cap'n Noll going out to look at his lobster-pots," exclaimed the boy. "Wonder if he'll wait for me to change my rig. Ahoy, Cap'n! Ahoy, I say! Want to come, Del?"

"No," replied Del, with decision; "not in that dirty old fishing-dory. Run along fast, or Cap'n Noll won't wait."

But the captain did wait, for he had an especial kindness for Eric and loved to talk with the bright-faced lad about the sailor-life. On this occasion, as they were pulling homeward, two hours later, with the boat well laden, the captain, dropping the boastful tone in which he had been relating some incredible adventure of his upon an Arctic icefloe, reverted to his favorite theme.

"Ay, ay, my boy. I want you to sail the seas. There's no life like it. It makes a man brave and generous and God-fearing. 'Tis in the reason of things that it must. A sailor can't face wind and weather, year in, year out, climbing the icy riggin' on pitch-dark nights, with the vessel reeling like mad beneath him—he can't listen to the

grinding o' the icebergs through the dark or hear the hiss o' the waves when they show their white teeth to the storm rolling up from the horizon, and come out of it at last a coward. No, no; and the ocean takes the petty stuff out o' human nater, too. A man with all the wideness of sea and sky spread about him ain't going to cut down his soul to the measure of a dollar-bill. And as for religion — well! if there's any church as holy as the blue mid-ocean or any argyment as down-right convincin' as a genuine Nor'-easter, I'd like to know it. A sailor may be a scoundrel as well as a landsman, but at any rate he knows he's a scoundrel. He may break all o' God's commandments his first twenty-four hours on shore, but he'll not be drunk enough then to tell you there's no God with commandments to break. Sail the seas, my boy. It's rough an' it's lonesome an' it's fearsome at times, but there's no life like it."

And the old captain turned his big body in the dory, and, relaxing his grip on the tiller, stared out over the rolling waters with a vague, far-away gaze, while Eric, shipping his oars, leaned forward and looked also, his eyes so bright with eager desire that a beholder might well have put faith in the prophetic powers of the little fortuneteller, who had read the boy his destiny from the sea-resounding shell.

Meanwhile the sibyl was feeling inclined to practice this new profession farther. It appeared to Del that it would be much better fun to tell other people's fortunes that afternoon than to live out her own, and so, hurrying back to the house and escaping from the drenched bathing-suit into her customary clothing, she clambered up to the narrow attic and proceeded to select certain embellishments for her dress from a large trunk of discarded finery. It was from this same trunk that the pink sash had come. Turning over the contents with a light, yet lingering touch, Del chose a kerchief of faded saffron, which she tied about her head, a long window curtain, figured in blue and buff, of fine fabric, but hopelessly torn, which she wound about her body, pinning it securely with four large blue rosettes, and last of all a pair of old satin slippers, once yellow, into which she pushed with delight her little bare brown feet.

As the girl, looking more like a gypsy than ever in this novel array, was slipping noiselessly out of the house, so as not to disturb her father, who might possibly be closeted in his study, she encountered Miss Lucas. The housekeeper surveyed her without surprise or curiosity or reproof. Del dropped a merry little courtesy.

“Shall I tell you your fortune, Miss Lucas?”

The woman looked at her with that habitual dull gaze for a moment and then a sudden tremor passed across her eyelids and her lips.

“My fortune was told ten years ago,” she answered, and mechanically adjusting a disordered fold of the saffron kerchief, moved quietly away.

To meet Miss Lucas had caused Del no concern. The housekeeper rarely interfered with her goings and comings, and, so far as her costume was concerned, the girl supposed that she was the only person in the house who took the slightest interest in the moth-eaten contents of this old trunk, which Miss Lucas designated as rubbish and which Dolo refused to touch. As for Mr. Rexford, Del doubted whether he knew of the existence even of the attic, much less of the trunk and its miscellaneous collection of bygone braveries. But he had sometimes rebuked her sharply for her overflow of high spirits, and it was not without a start of dismay that Del, as she turned the corner of the house, came abruptly upon her father.

“Oh!” she exclaimed, before she could check herself.

Mr. Rexford, who had apparently stepped out from his study to recapture from the thievish wind some slips of paper closely covered over with mathematical computations, faced sternly

round upon her, but as his swift glance swept her costume from crown to toe, an expression of keenest pain contorted his features.

"You look too much like your mother," he said vehemently, almost fiercely. "You are too much like your mother. Why are you tricked out in this fashion? What do you want? Have you found fools and flatterers in this waste fragment of space already?"

"Father!" exclaimed Del, in utter amazement. Stern and harsh as he was, she had never heard this ring of bitterness in his tone before, nor seen so strange an irony flash from his dark eyes.

Mr. Rexford bit his lip and changed his tone.

"There, there!" he said, more kindly than usual; "never mind. You startled me. But don't stand staring in that rude fashion. Go wherever you were going and quickly. The sooner you tear those fripperies to pieces on the bushes the better."

Del availed herself promptly of this ungracious permission, and, catching off the satin slippers, tender with time, that she might run the faster, sped away like a young fawn over the sandy footpath that led toward the Yorke farm.

But as she ran her eyes were full of indignation and perplexity and grief. What was it that her strange, moody, irritable father had said about her

mother, that fair-haired, violet-eyed young mother, the angel of her dreams? It was seven years ago that she had died, but Del remembered her well and could still feel at night, as she lay between sleeping and waking, the light, caressing touch upon her hair—could still hear the sudden rain of tears upon her pillow. It had been Del's pride and joy to compare her own face in the glass with a card-photograph of her mother which an old nurse had given her at the time when, a few days after the funeral, the unknown father appeared, dismissed the servants and carried his daughters away from their pleasant city home to this solitary island. Del had studied the two faces, the one in the little cracked mirror, childish, sunburned and blithesome, the other on the worn slip of card—womanly, wan and sorrowful—until she knew with certain knowledge that the resemblance between the two in outline and feature was almost perfect. This had been her cherished secret. She had not confided it to Dolo, not only because the sisters had so little life in common, but because Del feared, with sympathetic delicacy, that Dolo would be stung with the sense of her own unlikeness to that sainted mother, whose memory was a religion with them both. And there was no one else on the island—for seven years past all her world—who had ever seen her

mother, except her father and possibly the old Hermit, neither of these being accessible, in the way of conversation, to poor little Del. She had kept hidden away in the inmost recesses of her heart, however, a shy, dreamlike hope that some day her father would look at her with a more attentive gaze than the short, indifferent or displeased glance which was all he ordinarily vouchsafed to either of his children, and would then, startled by the look of her mother in her face, soften toward her—smile upon her, perhaps, and reach out his arms, or even bend his head, white with those untimely snows, and kiss her. For Del felt the yearnings of a blind, wistful pity toward this unfatherly father of hers and longed for permission to love and comfort him. Dolo, on the contrary, regarded him with suspicion and anger, and, in proportion as she idolized the remembrance of her mother, hated the father whom she believed in some way responsible for the many hours that young mother had passed weeping bitterly upon her knees, Dolo's dark little head nestled against her shoulder; for if Del joyed in the assurance that she was her mother's breathing image, Dolo, too, had her consoling secret, in the belief that she had been of the two children the one more dearly beloved. If Del could not recall, in her recollection of those swift days of child-

hood, a moment's lack of tenderest affection and care, Dolo remembered with vivid distinctness times when her mother, catching her up and pressing her close against the breast in a passionate overflow of love, would cover the dark, strange little face with tears and kisses, clasping her with a force that hurt the child, and then, lost in thought, would sit, still straining the patient little form to her bosom, until Dolo's limbs were cramped and stiff and her baby heart big with wonder and distress. If Mr. Rexford had spoken to Dolo of her mother, as he had just now spoken to Del, the black eyes would have flashed responsive fire into his; but Del was more hurt than resentful and more disappointed and bewildered than either. Her father had seen the likeness, but had rebuked and scorned her for it. What did he mean? What could he mean? For if it were not good to look like the beautiful young mother who had been in Heaven so long, what on the earth was good and what was worth desiring? Del's eyes were still tear-misted, as she turned into the sandy field where Robert Yorke was working diligently to gather in the scanty crop of hay. Nathan had just thrown down his rake and was awkwardly twisting his long arms into his jacket-sleeves.

"Sorry to leave you in the lurch, Rob," he

called; "but it's time for Calculus, and I don't dare keep Pepperpot waiting."

"Hush! There's Del," said Robert, quickly.

Del was too near not to have overheard both remarks, but she came up smiling, though her cheeks were still flushed and tear-stained, and sitting down on a low hay-cock, fitted her little feet again into the old satin slippers.

Nathan, turning an unbecoming crimson over face and ears and neck, caught his foot in the rake and executed a surprising gambol to save himself from falling.

"I—I beg your pardon, Del," he stammered; "I'm always bound to make an ass of myself, but nobody knows better than I what a help these lessons are to me, and I appreciate your father's kindness and patience—well, yes; hem!—that is, when he is patient—I mean that—no matter if—that is to say"—

"Oh, hold up, there!" laughed Rob; "Mr. Rexford must be patient, patient as Job, to spend his time over such a tongue-crooked fellow as you. Nat appreciates it down under, Del, if he can't get it to the surface. The milk is all right, only it's hard churning. We always have to wait for Nat's ideas to come to butter."

Del laughed. "I think father likes to teach Nat," she said; "he's more particular about that

appointment than anything else in the day. And as for time," she added, a little mournfully, "I should think father had time enough. He doesn't do anything from morning to night but walk about the island, all alone, and cipher away there in his study."

"Cipher!" exclaimed Nathan, contemptuously; "he calculates eclipses and computes orbits and does no end of awfully difficult astronomical work! I tell you, he's a master-hand at mathematics and no mistake about it."

"What's the good of it all?" asked Robert, pausing to wipe his heated face.

"What's the good of all the writing your own father does?" demanded Del, flying to her parent's defence with unexpected spirit.

Robert took up his scythe again and fell to work with redoubled energy.

"Father sells an article to a newspaper or a magazine once in a while," he said.

"And some day he means to publish a book," added Nat, glancing at his brother uneasily.

Del was perfectly satisfied with these replies, if the boys were not, and laid down her arms as suddenly as she had taken them up.

"Oh, if I were a magazine-man or a publisher, I would give Uncle Maurice a piece of gold for every word he writes!" she said, enthusiastically;

"but I can't see how anybody can bear to work over columns of stupid figures all day or care anything for them after they are done. Do you really like Calculus, Nat?"

Nat blinked in the sunshine and stared at her reflectively.

"Yes, I like it," he answered, slowly, as if he were sinking his words, like plummets, into depths of hitherto unsounded thought; "and what's more," he added, abruptly, "I must cut and run, or I shall be late." And the long-legged fellow, clapping his hand on a well-worn volume, bulky with papers, that protruded from his jacket pocket, started off on a grotesque trot.

But Del had not been so absorbed in her trouble and perplexity as to fail to notice the boys' disregard of her costume, and she called out after the runaway—

"Wait, Nat! Look at my gypsy-dress. I'm a fortune-teller and I prophesy that father won't give you any lesson this afternoon."

But at this dread prediction, Nathan's long legs plied the air more energetically than before, and it was but a vague, unseeing glance he cast behind him.

Robert, however, looked up from his mowing and surveyed the quaint little figure with a good-humored smile.

"Well, well! you are tricked out this time, sure enough," he commented; "that toggery must be hot, isn't it? But it looks nice."

Del pouted.

"I might as well dress up for two mackerel or even cunners as for you and Nat," she said, disdainfully; "where's Eric? He knows what is pretty, when he sees it. Oh, I remember. He's out with Cap'n Noll. And he ought to be helping you. What a bad boy!"

"Why, what's the matter with what I said?" demanded Robert, in surprise; "I think it's an uncommonly jolly rig."

"It isn't what you say, it's what you don't say," returned Del, slightly mollified; "but see here, Rob! You've been at work all day and you look tired. Why didn't you just make Eric help you this afternoon?"

"I suppose it would have been much better all around if I had," returned Robert, mowing steadily; "but Eric is young yet and I hate to hold his nose to the grindstone, especially when it's the only handsome nose in the family. It doesn't look much like rain to-night and any way our hay is so salt that a little fresh water wouldn't hurt it. And Eric—well! The youngster slipped off for his swim after dinner, and I haven't set eyes on him since. So he's out with Cap'n Noll. I

guessed as much. He likes the sea better than the hayfield."

Del leaned back against the haycock and watched for a time in silence the rise and fall of the stalwart young shoulders and the regular swing of the scythe.

"Seems to me everything comes on you, Rob," she remarked, after a little.

"Oh, no," said Robert, smiling; "I don't do the ironing or the baking or darn the stockings, and that last is a terrible job at our house, when it's too cold to go barefoot."

"Well, then, everything comes on you and your mother," persisted Del.

"Too much comes on poor mother, that's a fact," replied the young man, and if Robert Yorke had ever been known to sigh, Del would have been sure that she heard him sigh then.

"It's a weary world," quoth Del, lugubriously, after a moment of sympathetic silence. But at that Robert laughed outright.

"Might be worse," he said, cheerily, and mowed so fast that Del, in order to maintain the conversation, was obliged to move to the next haycock.

"What would you do if you should dig up a fortune on the island, Rob?" Del asked. "Perhaps Captain Kidd buried some of his treasure here."

"Precious little cut-throat gold in this sandbank, I guess," answered Robert, as good-naturedly as if he were not wishing in his heart that Del would remember how talking hindered him. "If I turn up potatoes enough this summer to fill our six mouths, I shall be satisfied."

"No, but make believe," coaxed Del. "What would you do?"

"Well," answered Rob, "I would bundle Nat off to college, for one thing. He has too many brains in his homely noddle to spend his life digging clams and setting lobster-pots."

"Nat is homely, isn't he?" observed Del, in a musing tone. Robert cast a somewhat surprised glance upon her.

"Why, yes," he said; "why shouldn't he be?"

"But it doesn't run in the family," said Del.

"Oh, well," replied Robert, with a careless laugh, "Nat's bound to be original in everything. He's like a pearl-oyster—that fellow. He carries his jewel inside."

Del deliberated in silence for a moment on this comparison. Then she returned to the charge.

"What else would you do, Rob?"

"Well, there's Eric. Guess the naval academy at Annapolis would suit him pretty well."

"The naval academy? What's that? I don't know about it. Tell me," said Del.

"Father'll tell you," replied Robert; "ask him. He's the universal encyclopædia and circulating library of this island."

"What else would you do?" demanded Del.

Robert leaned on his scythe and pushed back his torn straw hat, that the sea-breeze might fan his wet forehead.

"I would send Nick inland with mother. The winters here are too rough for that little chap. I don't like to hear him cough every morning."

"Would you send Aunt Marion inland?" asked Del.

Robert was answering quite seriously now. These replies were not sudden flights of imagination, but the fruits of such perplexed and anxious thought as usually falls to the lot of father rather than of son.

"I would take mother back to her own folks. She pines for the hills and woods she was used to when she was a girl, and she hates the very look of the ocean. It would be good," continued the lad, as if talking to himself, "to hear mother laugh again."

"And how about Uncle Maurice?" asked Del. "You mustn't leave him out."

"Leave him out! I should think not," replied Robert, with kindling eyes. "Father should have the best of everything, always, as he deserves,

and no trouble about it. He never was made for practical affairs, and it's a shame that he ever need be bothered with them. Really, Del, your Captain Kidd idea gets interesting. I believe I'll fetch my hoe."

As Del's eyes watched the glowing, smiling face of the young haymaker, a shade of dissatisfaction crept over them, dimming the blue.

"You're such an uncomfortably good fellow, Rob," she exclaimed, "you make the rest of us seem so selfish. I had planned no end of things I would do, if I found a buried treasure in the fields, or if a gold-chest washed up on shore, but not such things as those. I could draw in the sand for you every arch and column of the beautiful palace I would build in the loveliest spot of all the world. It should be just like the Alhambra in Uncle Maurice's big book. And I could tell you the names of all my fleet white horses, with arched necks and flowing manes, that would eat out of my hand. I have put myself to sleep ever so many nights thinking about those horses. But you are so dreadfully matter-of-fact and—and—well! I suppose perhaps it's the best way. But wouldn't you do anything for yourself, Rob?"

Robert laughed and went on swinging his scythe with the easy grace of strength.

"Yes," he said, with a twinkle in the eye that

peeped at Del through a crevice in the dilapidated hat-brim ; "there's one thing I'd do for myself."

"Oh, what ?" demanded Del, eagerly.

"There's one thing that I'd get for myself," repeated Robert, adding meditatively, "that is, if I could afford it."

"What ?" cried Del, rolling off the haycock in her impatience.

"A new straw hat," concluded Robert.

Del was so disgusted that she started to go home, but repented and came back, standing very straight as she faced this frivolous young farmer.

"Rob, do you want me to tell your fortune ?"

"Will it take long ?" asked Robert, glancing somewhat anxiously toward the declining sun.

The unappreciated sibyl stamped her foot in vexation. This was not lessened when she found that she had stamped upon a nettle, from which the sole of her satin slipper afforded small protection.

"Robert Yorke," she said, with unwonted severity, for the tingling foot ruffled her prophetic mind, "your fortune will be worse than you will ever tell and better than you will ever know. You'll give away everything that belongs to you, until some day you'll wish you hadn't, and then some other day," added Del, relenting as the sting in her foot grew easier, "you'll be glad you

did. For you are really ever so good, Rob, and if it wasn't for Uncle Maurice and Grandma Brimblecomb, I don't know but what you would be almost the nicest person on the island."

"You're not partial to your own family, at any rate," laughed Robert. "Hello! There comes Eric."

"Oh, elegant!" cried the sibyl, dancing with delight, but at a safe distance from the nettle; "now at last I'll have somebody to admire my dress."

Eric, ruddy as a young David, came bounding across the field.

"Whew!" he cried, a rod away, "isn't that a daisy get-up, though! It's tiptop. It beats the sea-weeds hollow. I tell you, it's la-la. Don't you think so, Rob?"

"I think you had better pick up that hayrake, young man, and get to work," returned the elder brother, trying to speak sternly.

But Del was satisfied, and, selecting a haycock midway between the two lads, arranged the folds of her blue and buff drapery with an eye to the picturesque.

CHAPTER V.

THE HERMIT.

Cooling of the air with sighs
In an odd angle of the isle, and sitting,
His arms in this sad knot.

— WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE.

WHILE Del was chatting with the Yorke boys in the hayfield, Dolo was paying a visit to no less a personage than the veritable oldest inhabitant, the Hermit himself. For there is no gentle heart, however desolate, that may not, at one time or another, open in response to the new touch upon the latchstring and among the embers on the hearth awaken a little glow of welcome for the unexpected guest. Even thus it had come to pass that the recluse of fifty years had now, at the latter end of his bleak and broken life, found a friend in this unaccountable little maiden, who, so wayward with her sister, so cold to the majority of her few companions on the island, chose to bestow upon this forlorn old man

something of the same grave and watchful tenderness that Baby Merry knew and loved.

As Dolo, walking along the sand with swift, light steps, neared the south-western corner of the island, she descried in the low doorway of the familiar hut the crouching figure of the Hermit, wrapt in a long butternut coat, the thin white hairs blowing about his bared head and one withered hand mechanically beating time to the melancholy tune he was crooning. Dolo recognized the strain as far away as she could hear it. Indeed, there was no one on the island, not even Mr. Rexford and Miss Lucas excepted, who had not taken advantage of some summer gloaming to steal quietly up the shore to hearken to the monotonous cadences of the incoherent ballad, presumably of his own composition, through which the Hermit told his neighbors all that they knew of the twenty odd years before that autumnal twilight when, as tradition said, a wild-eyed young man, pallid and travel-stained, but with a well-filled purse, had appeared in the opposite village on the mainland and purchased the western half of the island, which he had never once quitted since taking up his residence there the day after the sale. Usually, when a human form came in sight, the Hermit hushed his recitative and vanished inside his doorway. This was why the

islanders drew near by dusk to listen. But since the bright May morning, four summers ago, when Dolo, then a child barely ten years old, had flashed out upon him from behind the hut with her arms full of the trailing arbutus, which she showered upon his knees—a wealth of sweet, pink, dewy blossoms, the old man had neither silenced his singing nor withdrawn from view at her approach. This afternoon his tones struck Dolo's ear as low and feeble beyond their wont, and she noticed that he was not chanting his score or more of crude stanzas consecutively, but was selecting one here and another there, as fancy led him.

“Oh, fare ye well, my father's halls!
The sunset gleams, the ocean calls,
The eager waters westward flow;
I'll come again, when hawthorns blow.

“The lonely prairie reaches far.
A household light—my guiding star.
A rough log-cabin small to see,
But large in hospitality.

“Like violets shy her eyes were blue,
Yet violets smile through globes of dew,

And so my love in April years
Had learned to smile on me through tears.

“Too young. Too rich. Nay, trust him not;
A rover’s vows are soon forgot.’
No faith had they in lovers’ eyes,
Or love’s delight in sacrifice.

“I cannot leave their hearth, for they
Have me alone for staff and stay.
I must not share your eastward path;
Farewell, but speak it not in wrath.’

“That midnight ride across the plain!
Her message burned my heart and brain.
I kissed the dead at morning-sun,
And ever since I am undone.

“I know not where my wits may be,
But circled by the moaning sea,
My love, my lost, I sing of thee,
And some day death will pity me.”

Instead of proceeding directly to the hut, Dolo, her eye attracted by the glint of briar roses in the tall grass on top of the bluff, turned her steps in that direction, for the island, it should be under-

stood, consisted of a long, earthy ridge, descending abruptly on north and south to low, flat beaches. In fact, as Eric once brilliantly suggested, if only Hermit Island had been joined to two continents, it would have been an isthmus. The western side was rocky, but elsewhere the island was as devoid of rocks as of trees, and the soil was so poor and ocean-starved that Robert's most diligent labors on the farm, seconded by such aid as Nathan and Eric might render, yielded but barren results. The soil produced of its own will nothing but coarse weeds and grasses, with sweetbay, blueberries, cranberries, strawberries and roses, a patch or two of May-flowers in the spring and in the fall abundant splendor of golden rod. Of the five structures on the island, three were built on the south beach, under shelter of the bluff, as near the line of flood tide as was practicable, but the Yorke house and barn stood higher, at the eastern point of the strip of upland.

Though the incline was steep here at the western end of the island, Dolo clambered nimbly up the sandy slope and plucked a few beckoning sprays of the wild roses. Then gathering her skirts about her, she deliberately sat down on her little bare heels and coasted over the bank in the most approved island fashion, landing in a comfortable, topsy-turvy bunch upon the soft white

sand at the bottom. The Hermit was following her movements with brightening eyes, and though his tremulous right hand still beat the time, the gray lips had forgotten to sing.

Dolo came up smiling and slipped one of the daintiest sprays into that poor, restless hand, which thereupon desisted from its mechanical motion, clasping loosely the prickly stem. Dolo touched his shoulder lightly with two small brown fingers, and the Hermit moved to one side on the step, so as to give her room to pass by him into the windowless hut. The interior was a single room, furnished with a brick fireplace, a bundle of drift-wood, a heap of buffalo robes, a kettle, bowl, spoon, meal-chest, salt-box, and sea-biscuit can. Dolo, evidently accustomed to the place, glanced about her sharply, tidied the disordered buffalo robes, laid a few bits of the drift-wood ready for an evening fire, took the bowl out behind the hut to a brackish well, where she filled it with water and then arranged the roses in it, grouping them with a tasteful delicacy of touch one would hardly have expected from such a little barbarian, deftly twisted a mat of grasses, placed upon this a couple of the hard biscuits, with a fragment of dried fish, which with a somewhat irregular philanthropy she had purloined from the frugal pantry at home, and finally set both mat and bowl upon the door-

step by the old man's side, curling herself up sociably in the sand near by.

The Hermit was still busied with the wild rose Dolo had given him, holding it close to his dim eyes and touching the exquisite petals timidly with first one finger-tip and then another.

"The same color!" he was murmuring; "the same color! When was it? Where was it? The same color!"

The old man, dropping the rose, clasped his temples in his two hands with a dazed expression. After a little, he began to fumble in an inner pocket and finally drew out a curious old wallet, that seemed on the point of dropping to pieces for age. As the Hermit, so absorbed in the remote associations aroused by the tint of the rose-petals as to be oblivious of her presence, began with shaking hands to open the wallet, Dolo was distinctly aware that she would have a higher respect for herself all the rest of her life, if now she turned away her head. But the inquisitive little head sat too stiffly on its peering neck for that. Dolo wanted to see, and she saw. On the whole, there is no character in Hebrew Scripture whose example has been more generally followed than Esau's; for what is the ideal, far-glimmering birthright in comparison with the savory mess of pottage before one's hungry eyes? Dolo never

ceased to scorn herself for the vulgarity of that look; but she saw.

And after all, it was very little to see. There were greenbacks in one compartment, gold pieces in another, in the third a much-folded paper, which Dolo firmly believed to be a love-letter, but which was in reality the deed of the Hermit's half of the island, and in the last, together with a few dark, crumbling, still-fragrant bits of what had once been English violets, a simple bow of ribbon, such as a modest country girl might have worn at her throat. The ribbon was now of a dull yellowish hue. Perhaps it had once been pink. Who knows? At all events, the old man took this out with reverent tenderness, placed the fresh rose beside it, shook his white head in sad perplexity, and finally restored the ribbon to the wallet and the wallet to his pocket.

Dolo felt disappointed. The pottage—and this, by the way, is a permanent characteristic of pottage—had not come up to her expectations.

Stooping after the flower which he had dropped in putting back the wallet, the Hermit caught sight of the bowl of roses on the doorstep beside him, and of the spare supper made attractive by their presence. The cloud gradually cleared from his face, the look of bewilderment, bordering upon the wildness of insanity, melted from his

eyes, and glancing about for Dolo, he smiled upon her with a childlike friendliness. Dolo smiled back brightly and sweetly, as she smiled upon no one else save Baby Merry and rarely upon Nathan or his father.

The Hermit pointed to a black object, well to the westward, on the bluff above the rocks. Dolo knew it well. It was the hulk of a wrecked fishing schooner hurled ashore there in the terrible September gale years ago. The Hermit had left the bruised timbers undisturbed and they were now lichenized and mossed by time.

“Poor old wreck! Kind little moss!” said the Hermit, and nodded significantly. Then he laid the hand, with which he had pointed to the wreck, upon his breast, sighed wearily, and afterward smiled and passed his fingers caressingly over the roses in the bowl.

Dolo understood. “I like to do things for you,” she remarked, briefly but convincingly. The Hermit repeated the words to himself in a pleased, crooning tone several times over. Then a painful thought seemed to strike him, for he bent forward with a sudden motion and looked the girl anxiously in the face.

“When are you going?” he asked.

“Going where?” returned Dolo, in surprise.

“Away—away.”

“Off the island?”

“Yes, away — away.”

“Why should you think I am going at all?” asked Dolo, puzzled.

The gleam in the Hermit’s eyes faded out. The excitement of dialogue quickly exhausted him. He had already lost his thought. But he held to the word *going* and muttered it over and over. Presently he turned to Dolo again.

“Wrecks stay here — only wrecks. You must be going — going.”

“Oh, but you don’t know how many people there are on the island,” said Dolo, cheerily.

“Wrecks,” insisted the Hermit.

“No,” said Dolo; “there’s Cap’n Noll” —

The Hermit’s eyes brightened again with the flash of what must have been once a keen intelligence.

“Not seaworthy,” he said, with something almost like mischief in his smile. “Fine craft. Great voyages. All done. Hauled up on shore. Past repairs.”

Dolo laughed outright. She had not hitherto suspected that the recluse had even distinguished his fellow islanders from one another — much less acquired any knowledge of their respective careers and characters.

“But there’s Mr. Yorke,” she suggested; “only

he likes better to have us call him Uncle Maurice."

The Hermit wagged his white head sagely.

"Drift," he said.

"Then there's my father," Dolo added, her black eyes now keenly intent upon the oracle.

"Wreck," pronounced the Hermit. "Hidden rocks."

Dolo started to speak again, but checked herself, observing that the old man's head had fallen forward on his breast. Wearied by the direct strain of conversation, for which his many years of solitude had unfitted him, the Hermit would often take this attitude, during Dolo's visits, as a sign to her that he could bear no more questions. But after a few moments of rest, he would sometimes, regardless of her presence, ramble on in incoherent talk, as if to himself, for half an hour at a time. On this occasion Dolo had longer to wait than usual, but the tide of speech once begun, although low and broken at first, soon grew firmer and clearer, riveting her attention.

"Going away—away! Who takes her away? Who strips the poor old wreck of its moss? Going away—away? Who said it? Did one of the faces in the dark say it? Mocking faces, cruel faces, hateful faces, horrible, angry faces that I hide from! Did the wood-sawyer say it?

What does that wood-sawyer want with me? Always there, always there, in the corner, sawing, sawing, with his face turned away! When the dark comes, he comes. Where does he go when the dark goes? He has been sawing so long. Why doesn't the wood fall? So long! Many, many, many nights! The wood must be nearly sawed through now. I wish I could see his face. Would it be evil, like the others? Why does he never turn his head? The other faces press close about me. I cover my eyes with the buffalo robes. But he—what look is on his face? That small stoop-shouldered figure always there and always sawing! It stays longer than the faces. It stays until the dark goes away. Going away? Who is going away? Where did I see it? Was it one of the pictures in the dark? It was the sea, and a path all of gold across it, and down the path a boat coming to the island. Will the boat take her away?"

Dolo started. The scene of the previous night flashed back upon her mind and her idle words with Nat. Her abrupt movement roused the Hermit out of his reverie. He looked up at her with his faint, wistful smile—a pathetic ghost of a smile, haunting a face that had long forgotten the living presence of joy, and spoke to her again, more rationally than before. For while his man-

ner toward Dolo was always gentle, the Hermit usually became, by the latter part of an interview, when the wholesome influence of this contact with a sounder and more natural mind than his own had had time to work upon him, far less wild and incoherent in his speech.

"You are not like your mother," he said, gazing earnestly upon the brown-faced, black-haired little figure before him.

Dolo reddened. Del had been right in her intuition. It was sorrow and shame to the younger sister—for Dolo was Del's junior by a year—that she bore the lineaments of the parent she distrusted and dreaded rather than of the parent she remembered with an intensity of yearning love and pain which was thus far the deepest passion of her life.

"When did you ever see my mamma?" she asked.

"It was her honeymoon," answered the Hermit, slowly; "she was young and her eyes were blue. Her eyes were glad. Not all blue eyes are glad. Her husband walked with her on the beach. It hurt me to see them."

The Hermit seemed about to lapse again into one of his brooding moods, but Dolo arrested him by a question.

"Was she ever here afterwards?"

The Hermit passed his hand across his brow in a weary effort at memory.

"There was another summer. A baby cried. She was paler when she walked on the beach. She leaned on her husband's arm. A nurse carried the baby. It had blue eyes, like hers. And it hurt me to see."

"Del born on the island!" exclaimed Dolo, in great surprise. "I wonder if I was born here, too. Did mamma come again? Please try and remember."

The girl's tone was eager and pleading, but the strength of the Hermit was well-nigh spent.

"Blue eyes shut too early," he sighed. "They showed us the color of heaven. But they are shut. And we forget the color."

The old man's head fell forward heavily upon his breast. Dolo realized, with a shoot of contrition, that she had allowed her feeble friend to exert himself too far. She rose, ran down to the well, wet her coarse little handkerchief, and, returning, touched it to the sallow cheeks and forehead. The Hermit, who was moaning faintly and rocking himself to and fro, reached out his hand for it and held it pressed against his eyelids.

"Well, let him keep it, then!" thought Dolo. "Miss Lucas will miss it when she counts my things over, but what do I care?"

And with an independent toss of the head, the girl turned away and strolled down to the shore, casting back one compassionate glance at the huddled, swaying, white-headed figure in the doorway of the lonely little hut.

The tide was coming in, and Dolo, throwing herself down upon the sand, watched the creaming surf. The sea-expanses was a soft gray, glinting here and there with emerald. There floated overhead a few cloud-films of a clear, delicate amethystine tint that shaded into the blue of the sky. Presently Nat came striding along the beach. He walked with tolerable ease until Dolo looked up and caught sight of him. Then embarrassment struck to his legs. They became wooden and irresponsible. Dolo marked his awkward gait calmly, but her calmness enhanced Nathan's confusion. No one was more conscious than himself of the aberrations of those unsubjected members.

"Why aren't you doing Calculus?" called Dolo.

"Your father wouldn't see me," replied Nathan, letting himself down cautiously and stiffly to a sitting posture upon the sand.

"Wouldn't see you?" echoed Dolo.

"No," growled Nathan; "and I wasn't late, either. I ran every step of the way. But he wouldn't see me."

"Why not?" queried Dolo, with an indiffer-

ent air. In reality she thought it very strange that her father should refuse to see Nat, when he was the only person on the island at whose coming the gloom on that austere face ever lifted; but it is not necessary to show all that one thinks.

"Don't know," replied Nat, punching holes in the sand with his long forefinger; "but Miss Tombstone—I mean—that is—Miss Lucas—met me at the door and told me that Mr. Rexford had gone into his study and left word with her that he was not to be disturbed."

"That's queer," commented Dolo, with a short laugh.

"May I stay here?" asked Nat, looking up at Dolo with gray eyes that had lights in them.

"If you won't talk," remarked Dolo, with a lazy little yawn. "I hate people that talk all the time."

"So do I," assented Nat, with unexpected cordiality, and promptly took up his Calculus.

In about an hour Dolo broke the silence.

"I should think you would rather look at the sunset than those old figures," she said.

Nat closed his Calculus and solemnly regarded the sunset.

Presently a wave broke over their feet and they moved back several paces.

In half an hour more Nat spoke. "It's supper-time. Let's go home."

Dolo had been on the point of making this very proposition, but to propose and to accept are diverse operations, requiring unlike states of mind. Dolo settled herself more comfortably on the sand, saying firmly—

"I shall wait for the moonrise."

Nat was hungry and had half a mind to tramp off alone, but thought better of it and waited, too. He reflected that pretty soon Dolo would get tired of being exasperating, and then she would be very good company.

Dolo did not get tired of being exasperating, but she forgot to keep it up. Her thoughts ran away with her and suddenly she exclaimed—

"Nat, should you like to go away from the island?"

"Of course I should," responded Nat.

"Why?" asked Dolo. "What is there off the island?"

"That's what I want to find out," said Nat.

"Why don't you ask your father to send you away to school?" inquired Dolo, demurely, the dusk serving to hide the wicked little lines at the corners of her mouth.

Nat flushed from his blouse-collar to the rim of his sandy hair.

"You know he can't. I wish you would keep still about my father. He does everything for us all, except"—

"What you want most," concluded Dolo.

Nat's flush grew darker. "Look out there! I won't stand it," he said in a low, threatening tone.

"I haven't said anything against your father," protested Dolo, with an innocent accent.

"You meant something," retorted Nat, sullenly.

"You're cross," observed Dolo, with serene indifference.

"I'll be crosser, if you don't take care," replied Nat, ungallantly.

Dolo laughed, rather as if she were pleased with her companion than otherwise, and changed the subject.

"What should you think, if I went away?"

"You!" exclaimed Nat.

"Yes. What should you think?"

"Pooh! You'll not go. How could you? Girls don't go away from places."

Then they sat silent a little longer, while the full moon, rising in an orange mist, cast her long, bright ray across the sea. Suddenly Dolo turned her head and listened. The Hermit had begun once more to croon his monotonous song. Dolo sprang to her feet and moved away with her swift, stealthy tread in the direction of the hut.

Returning shortly, she started down the beach for home. Nat soon overtook her.

"He's all right now," said Dolo.

"The Hermit?" asked Nat. "Was anything wrong with him to-day?"

"He seemed tired when I left him, but he has eaten his supper now and gone to singing," said Dolo. "He is growing very old. Some day I shall come to the hut and find him dead."

Nat drew a step away from her.

"I thought you were fond of him," he said.

"I am," replied Dolo. "That's how I know that he is growing old."

They paced the sand in silence for some minutes after that, Nat whistling softly and Dolo keeping her eyes steadily seaward. Presently she flung a question over her shoulder—"Why do you like mathematics?"

Nathan stopped whistling and considered.

"Seems truer than most things," he said. "That's all. Take Euclid, now. If this is so and that is so, why, the other something has got to be so, and there's no way out of it."

Dolo laughed one of her abrupt little laughs and shrugged her left shoulder.

"I like a way out, and I don't believe Euclid is any truer than—moonlight," she said.

Nathan glanced contemptuously out upon the

silvery ocean, spanned by that ruddy path, and then gave a violent start and grasped Dolo's arm.

"Look! look!" he cried, excitedly; "as true's I live, there's a boat coming down that beam of moonshine to the island."

"What else have I been looking at for the last half-hour?" asked Del, curtly.

[NOTE. The author begs leave to state that the stanzas ascribed to the Hermit are adapted from certain traditional ballad stanzas hinting at a like history and sung by a veritable hermit-poet, known as Dr. Jones, who died in Milford, N. H., some fifty years ago.]

CHAPTER VI.

THE ARRIVAL.

We are much bound to them that do succeed;
But, in a more pathetic sense, are bound
To such as fail. They all our loss expound;
They comfort us for work that will not speed,
And life—itsself a failure.

— JEAN INGELOW.

DOLO and Nat stood waiting. The boat came nearer and nearer, until the two figures in her could be clearly discerned. The oarsman Nat recognized as a grizzled old fisherman from the coast, but the passenger, a showily dressed man of middle age, half reclining in the stern, with a very pale face drooping over the water, had never been seen before in the vicinity of Hermit Island. The dash through the surf was accomplished without accident, and the fisherman, rising and steadyng his boat by one oar, called to Nat

to help the stranger land. But despite Nat's assistance, the passenger effected but a clumsy leap, getting himself wet to the knees.

"Catch!" he called from the shore to the boatman, flinging him a five-dollar gold-piece; "and be hanged to you. This is the vilest voyage I ever made."

"If gen'lemen will be seasick, so much the worse for the gen'lemen," growled back the offended skipper; "but ye couldn't hev had a tidier trip nor a slicker sea, if ye had prayed fur't. So good-night an' be hanged to *you*."

And whistling Yankee Doodle with patriotic fervor, this free and equal American in tarpaulin and duck nodded grimly to his fellow-citizen in silk hat and broadcloth, and pushed the dory off.

"Hold on, there!" called his ex-passenger after him; "you're to bring your leaky old tub around for me to-morrow morning at ten o'clock. Do you hear?"

"Ay, ay!" returned the incensed fisherman; "I hear an' thet's the end on't. Did ye ever hearn tell o' tides, or do ye take me fur a stage-coach an' four? May I kick the bucket this here blessed night, if ever I let the likes o' you set foot on plank o' mine agin."

"Nonsense, my man!" shouted the stranger, for the boat was fast receding; "come to-morrow

morning, like a good fellow, and earn another five dollars."

"Who sasses my boat sasses me," roared back the implacable skipper, passing his rough hand tenderly along the gunwale of his dory; "I would n't hurt the feelin's o' my leetle Nancy here by axin' her to take you in agin, arter them late remarks o' yourn—no, not fur a hatful of gold-pieces. A leaky old tub! My Nanny-boat!"

And the fisherman, glowering through the dark, bent to his oars with an energy that carried him swiftly out of earshot.

"And he a Yankee!" ejaculated the stranger, laughing in spite of his evident discomfiture; "I thought a Yankee would sell the tomb of his ancestors—colonial or otherwise—for a nickel."

"Then you thought wrong," observed Nat, in a tone of sulky displeasure.

The stranger took off his tall hat and bowed profoundly to the four quarters of the heavens, saying with mock humility—

"Be it known to all whom it may concern that I, a seasick, travelworn wanderer, visiting these inhospitable shores on an errand of friendship, do neither think, speak nor secretly intend the faintest shadow of disrespect to any baked-beans-and-brown-bread-devouring individual of all the Down East species—much less to Yankeedom at large.

Long live fishballs! Long live the nasal and the drawl! I ask for nothing but a chance to hide my diminished head in the nearest hotel, tavern, boarding-house or whatever there may be, and sleep off the remains of my seasickness before I attempt to renew intercourse with the high-minded (and hot-tempered) sons of the Puritans."

Whatever of wit there may have been in this address, Nat failed to discover. A keen dislike of the stranger had possessed him, and the boy, turning on his heel, unceremoniously walked away.

"Oh, the dickens! But this is carrying things too far," exclaimed the man, impatiently, placing his hat upon his head again, a little on one side; "is there nobody in this howling wilderness who will tell me where I can get a night's lodging? I'll shoot the man who says supper to me, but a bed I must have, and at short notice, too."

"Shall I telephone for a hack?" asked Dolo, suddenly, from the background.

The man wheeled about, and, catching sight of a girlish figure, hurriedly caught off his hat once more.

"Oh, thanks! Yes, if you would. But no! This young man is laughing. Are you joking me? We are more hospitable to strangers in the west."

Seeing how white his face showed in the moonlight, Dolo had a twinge of conscience, which communicated itself, by sympathy, to Nat.

"We're not much used to strangers here, sir," said Nat, strolling back again and making an effort to speak civilly; "and we have no hotels, hacks, telephones or anything of the sort."

"But there must surely be some place," urged the stranger, "where I can be taken in for the night."

Nat and Dolo exchanged doubtful glances.

"There's not a single spare bed in our house," said Dolo, in a low tone, "and father"—

Nat nodded. "Yes, I know. That wouldn't do. But I suppose I can turn in with Rob and give up my bunk. Nick and Eric bunk together, as it is, but they're small fry. Or maybe Cap'n Noll could manage to swing him a hammock over there."

"But do you mean to tell me," asked the stranger, "that there are private houses only on this island?"

"Yes—four of them," replied Nat, shortly.

"Four! Did you say four? And haven't you any arrangements for entertaining—we'll not say strangers, but your own friends and relatives?" inquired the man further, his astonishment evidently on the increase. "Not a log-cabin in the

west but has its guest-chamber, or, at the worst, guest-bed. You mustn't mind my surprise, you know, but all this seems so odd to me."

"It is odd. We're odd," said Dolo, in her abrupt fashion.

"I believe you," assented the stranger, fervently: "but do you never have visitors?"

"Cap'n Noll had his old first-mate over here once for a couple of days, three summers ago," said Nat, slowly, looking to Dolo for confirmation.

"Yes," said Dolo; "and that's all for seven years—except the tax-collector. He stayed to dinner with Cap'n Noll twice."

"Three times," corrected Nat.

"Great Scott! what a desert!" exclaimed the stranger.

"Oh! the fishermen touch here sometimes," put in Nat, half angrily, "and we boys, and sometimes Cap'n Noll with us, pull over to the coast once a week in the open weather. In winter we get along as we can. The women-folks never go off the island. Why should they?"

"Why shouldn't they?" asked Dolo. "Del and I wanted to go over to the coast with the boys last summer, just for once—wanted to so much that we even asked father if we might. Uncle Maurice wouldn't let the boys take us unless we asked father."

"And he said no," added Nat.

"Of course he did," said Dolo, resentfully, shrugging her left shoulder; "but—yes, it is odd, and we are odd and queer and not like folks."

"Queer! I should think you would all be lunatics," exclaimed the stranger; "but how—begging your pardon—how can you tell that you are not like folks? How should you know what folks are like? And where, my lady jester, did you ever hear of the telephone?"

"Books," responded Dolo, concisely; "Uncle Maurice knows everything, and he teaches us. Our minds can get off the island, if we can't."

"You mean we can, if our bodies can't," remonstrated Nat. "Minds are the we-part of us. I've always told you that."

Dolo shook her head at Nat with a disputatious shake, but the stranger, cutting short the impending metaphysics, broke in with renewed exclamations of amazement.

"The loneliness of it! The folly of it! The sheer waste and madness of it! To think that a fellow like Horace Rexford should bury his talents in such a Robinson Crusoe solitude as this! Preposterous! And poor Mary's children! Something must be done. Something must be done."

At that moment Dolo chanced to step from the shadow into the full moonlight, and the

speaker, getting his first view of her features, checked himself abruptly.

“It must be—but no! Impossible. And yet it must be. It is Horace Rexford’s face, but Mary Rexford’s daughter here in such a—I beg a thousand pardons. I am still so bewildered from the effects of my sea-sickness, so faint and light-headed, that I forget my manners. Yet it must be that I have the pleasure of addressing Miss Rexford.”

Dolo stared. She had never before been called Miss Rexford in all her fourteen years. She had a vague intuition that there was some particular thing this gentleman expected her to say or do, but what it was she knew no more than a sand-peep would know how to sing at a canary party.

“Oh, but this is too bad!” said the stranger, involuntarily; “and the last time I saw Mary Rexford she was the queen of the ball-room.” He checked himself again, and, bowing somewhat more jauntily than elegantly to Dolo, added in a different tone—

“I am James Grafton, of Colorado Springs, a business acquaintance of your father, and a neighbor and admirer of your mother from the time our nurses pushed our baby-carriages side by side in Central Park, to the evening I danced with her at her coming-out ball—the prettiest affair of the

season. I have come down from Boston, where I was called by business, to this extraordinary island, though I am a wretchedly bad sailor, solely for the purpose of having a friendly chat with your father, and I am more than delighted to be so fortunate as to meet his daughter at the outset."

"I was rude about the telephone and the hack," said Dolo, abruptly, abashed for the first time since her mother died and burrowing in the sand with one bare foot.

"Oh, that was only a little joke," Mr. Grafton hastened to say. "Don't mention it. I quite enjoyed it, I assure you. And now perhaps you will be so good as to make me acquainted with your escort, this fine young fellow here."

However much Dolo might be conciliated by the blandishments of the stranger, Nat liked him less than ever. But the Yorke boys, despite their isolated life, had not been without home training and home example in courtesy during all these years that the little Rexford girls had been running wild, and Nat twitched off his hat and executed an awkward bow, as Dolo found words to say—

"This? Oh, this is Nathan Yorke. It's his father, Uncle Maurice, who teaches us."

"Uncle Maurice?" queried Mr. Grafton.

"Not a really truly uncle," explained Dolo; "but we call him so, because he's good to us, and

we call Nat's mother Aunt Marion, and there's Grandma Brimblecomb, too. But Cap'n Noll is just Cap'n Noll. He likes that best."

Mr. Grafton looked bewildered, and Nathan, ashamed at heart of the injustice his churlish behavior was doing his father, forced himself to speak with a show of cordiality, the moral effort being painfully manifest in the jerkiness of his utterance.

"We mustn't keep Mr. Grafton standing here, Dolo. He's wet and half-sick. You had better come home with me, sir. We can give you only a bunk, but it's pretty soft—for a bunk. And father will make you very welcome. So will mother."

"That's cheery," responded Mr. Grafton, with a ring of relief in his voice. "Sorry to impose myself upon you in this off-hand fashion, but if you'll take me in to-night and provide me with a boat and boatman to-morrow, you'll put me under lasting obligations. And now shall we be walking on? Hello! Get out; get out, I say! Confound that wave! I'm wet again."

Dolo laughed outright, and even Nat, for all his better breeding, found it hard to keep his countenance, as the indignant inlander, suddenly splashed by the surf, turned upon the ocean with a profane and ineffectual kick.

“‘Tisn’t much use telling the waves to get out, when the tide’s rising,” commented Nat, leading the way higher up the beach; “but you won’t catch cold from salt water. And we’ll be home in ten minutes, where mother’ll give you a first-rate cup of hot tea. Supper’ll be ready and waiting, because I’m late to-night.”

“Supper? Hem! Well, perhaps I could manage that cup of tea you speak of and maybe a morsel of toast,” admitted Mr. Grafton, who was already much revived.

An hour later this sea-vexed voyager was quite himself again, and, extended at lazy length in a wooden arm-chair before a blazing open fire, made himself so much at home that little Nick whispered to his mother, with an awe-stricken countenance—“Is he the President of America?”

The Yorke family, with Dolo and the stranger, were grouped about the five-foot fireplace piled high with drift-wood and seaweed. Mr. Grafton had possessed himself of Mr. Yorke’s chair, and that gentleman sat with humility on an uncomfortably hot corner of the wood-box. Nick nestled at his mother’s knee, Nat leaned against the mantel-shelf, Rob reposed his tired limbs on a long settle across whose further end Eric sat astride, and Dolo’s dark face peered out from the shadows that obscured all the room beyond the

radius of the leaping firelight. The apartment was large, plainly, almost rudely furnished, but stamped rather by a free-and-easy simplicity than by the grim and desolate nakedness of the Rexford living-room. Pictures cut from magazines were pasted upon the walls, books were scattered about, fishing-rods leaned up in a corner, one of Eric's well-whittled boats stood on a bracket fashioned by the same young carpenter, great shells from foreign shores, whale-teeth curiously carved, and corals—all these the gifts of Cap'n Noll, were ranged upon the mantel, and the many-tinted flames lent a magic and a glory to the whole.

"Really," remarked Mr. Grafton, in a tone which the young people vaguely felt to be objectionable; "really, you are very snug here. Very snug."

"Nat, hand Mr. Grafton a screen," suggested Mrs. Yorke, a little timidly, for it was a long time now since she had been called upon to minister in the sacred rites of hospitality; "the fire is too hot on his face."

Nat slowly bestirred himself and passed one of Nick's picture-cards wedged into a cleft stick.

"Now I call this ingenious," said Mr. Grafton, laughing more loudly than seemed necessary. "I think I'll have to carry this off with me for a

keepsake—that is, if the ladies will make it precious by writing their names on it."

"Jingo! How silly!" observed Eric, in a frank and cheerful tone.

"Hush, my son!" interposed Mrs. Yorke, much scandalized. "You must excuse these children, Mr. Grafton. They are fast turning into savages, all of them, since we came to live on this wretched island."

And Mrs. Yorke sighed the weary sigh to which her family had grown accustomed.

"Pray don't distress yourself, my dear lady," said Mr. Grafton, good-naturedly—too good-naturedly, Dolo thought. "Boys are always savages. It's in the nature of the animal. Why, I was a boy myself once, and I dare say acted very much like these youngsters. I know my poor mother used to get tired of sending me out into the garden to break sticks off the currant-bushes."

"What for?" asked Nick, innocently.

Mr. Grafton winked, and rubbed his shoulders with a significant grimace.

"Oh, for badness!" said Nick, and nodded with a sage expression. "When I'm bad, I have to sit still on my little stool and think about it half an hour."

"I should prefer the currant-stick," said Mr. Grafton. "Sitting still never was my forte."

“Do currant-bushes grow in the neighborhood of Central Park?” asked Nat, with a suspicious glance.

The quick-witted man of the world took his point instantly.

“You didn’t see many kitchen-gardens in New York, the last time you were there, eh?” he inquired, with a laugh; “my father’s house was in the suburbs, but the nurses from all the region about liked to gather and gossip in the Park. You would make a good lawyer on a cross-examination, young man.”

Nat wound his long legs about each other and felt as if he would rather have the blame of this stranger than the praise.

“Nat wouldn’t make a good lawyer, either,” remarked Eric, with brotherly candor; “he stammers too much.”

Robert gave the too ingenuous youth a reprobating little kick, to which Eric responded by tickling Rob’s ankles.

“But what do you expect to make of any of these fine lads, off on this desert sandbank, Mr. Yorke?” inquired the stranger, turning sharply on his host.

“I had not realized,” answered Mr. Yorke, with an accent of blended courtesy and deprecation, “that it was time to think of that.”

Mrs. Yorke heaved another sigh, while Robert and Nathan both flushed red.

“Time!” said Mr. Grafton, in a tone that made Nat clench his hands; “my own boy has known what his career is to be since he was the age of this small shaver here.”

“I know what mine’s to be,” announced Nick, solemnly; “I shall be an anarchist.”

The family looked considerably startled.

“Nat told me about ‘em,” added Nick; “it’s like fire-crackers, only holier. You do it to save your country, like Thomas—no, it’s William Tell, and sometimes you don’t get hung.”

The family countenance gradually cleared, and Mr. Grafton, with an impatient wave of the hand, resumed his interrupted statement.

“My Jim has known since his sixth birthday that I mean him for a lumber-king, and every summer that boy teases to spend his vacation in the camps. I’m giving him what I call an eminently practical education, and when he comes to his twenty-first year, there won’t be a shrewder head for business in the state than his. He’s bound to make one of the biggest fortunes going, and it grinds him every day to think he’s a minor and can’t be taking up some of these corner-sections of government land. He knows the points of timber already better than his father

does, and I'm no green hand at the business, though I've made my own pile in mining speculations."

"You seem to have a great respect for money," suggested Mr. Yorke, dreamily.

The other stared.

"Well, yes; I should rather say I had. What do you mean? Has money gone out of fashion on Hermit island?"

"Guess 'twas never in," suggested Robert, from the settle.

"But how in time do you live?" asked the puzzled visitor.

"Uncle Maurice says we shouldn't live in time — we should live in eternity," volunteered Dolo.

"Oh, our neighbor, Captain Brimblecomb, is a man of some means," interposed Mrs. Yorke, hastily; "he owns this half of the island, and Mr. Rexford and my husband rent their houses of him. The further half is owned by the aged hermit from whom the island takes its name."

"What sort of a customer is he?" asked Mr. Grafton, carelessly; "some poor, half-witted old vagabond, I suppose."

Dolo, stung by this reference to her friend, and supposing herself secure under cover of the shadows, made a menacing gesture with her slender arm in the direction of the guest. At that

instant came a sudden leap of the firelight, revealing the threatening little figure in all its wickedness; but by good hap most of the company had their backs turned. Nat saw it, however, and smiled in grim approval.

Meanwhile Mr. Yorke was saying, almost sternly—

“He is a lonely man, made sacred by long sorrow; let us not speak of him.”

Mr. Grafton laughed and continued with unruffled affability. “Just as you please. But are your other neighbors, too, ‘unmentionable by profane lips? Who, for instance, is this Cap’n Brim—Noll—what is it you call him?’”

“O-li-ver Crom-well Brim-ble-*comb* is what grandma calls him,” said Eric; “but that’s when he tells us whoppers.”

“Captain Brimblecomb,” explained Mr. Yorke, courteously, “is a retired sea-captain, whose heart is still on the ocean. Since he cannot live on a ship longer, he takes this little island as a substitute. He is an excellent neighbor, rough but kindly, with perhaps an—an excess of the imaginative faculty.”

“Get him to show you his tattoo,” put in Eric, eagerly; “it’s just squee. I’d give anything if papa and mamma would let him do me all over in ships and light-houses and things; but they won’t.

They won't even let me have an anchor on the back of my right hand."

And Eric twisted about on the settle and pounded Robert's knees to soothe his own vexation of spirit—a mode of self-consolation which resulted in his being suddenly rolled off the bench and deposited upon the floor.

"Has this patron of the fine arts any family?" asked Mr. Grafton, pursuing his inquiries with interest.

"Yes," said Mr. Yorke; "he is blessed in a lively, wholesome-hearted little wife, whom all the children have adopted as a grandma; but the apple of his eye is an orphaned granddaughter, scarcely more than a baby yet and the pet of the island."

"She is a bright child," added Mrs Yorke, shaking her head mournfully; "I hope her grandparents will not be so blind to her interests as to try and rear her here. She should be sent inland. She should have schooling and breeding and opportunities."

"Poor little thing!" sighed Nick, catching his mother's tone, all unconsciously, with ludicrous effect; "I'm troubled about her, mamma. 'Deed I am. She doesn't know hardly nothin' at all about the world an' she won't believe me when I tell her things. I'm mortified to have her so

ig'orant. She says the stars are gold-pieces—'cause her grandpa puts one in her little bank for her every birthday, that's why she thinks so"—

"Puts in a star?" asked Robert.

"No, a gold-piece. You're pretty ig'orant, too, I guess," continued Nick, placidly; "an' she says a lovely white angel goes 'round every night an' polishes 'em up all bright and shiny on the under side of his wings. An' when I say 'tisn't so, she strikes me and runs away and won't play with me any more."

"No matter, youngster," said Mr. Grafton, after a burst of boisterous laughter, whereat Nick reddened and looked aggrieved; "you're not the first son of Adam to find out that the ladies have more ways than one of getting the best of an argument, and you won't be the last. So it seems," added the speaker, turning to Mr. Yorke, "that gold-pieces are not absolutely unknown in your rather bleak and sandy Arcadia. The old sea-dog must be well enough off. These weather-beaten old salts usually are. And how is it with Rexford? Does he carry on any business or pursue any calling whatever here?"

Mr. Yorke hesitated.

"I know Mr. Rexford but slightly," he said, glancing in Dolo's direction to remind the guest of her presence; "and he is disposed to be reti-

cent, so that I cannot undertake to say what his occupations may be. He is at present tutoring my son Nathan in the advanced mathematics, in return for the privilege I enjoy of giving some general instruction to his daughters, and he certainly seems to be the possessor of a rare mathematical enthusiasm and ability. But beyond that I can tell you nothing."

"Do you happen to know anything of his past career?" inquired Mr. Grafton, in an off-hand manner.

"I have not the honor of Mr. Rexford's confidence," replied Mr. Yorke, gravely.

"Humph!" said Mr. Grafton, with a movement of impatience; "what a shame it is that a man of his gifts should shut himself away from practical life—should fall out of the race for success!"

"What is practical life and what is success?" asked Mr. Yorke, in the musing tone the children knew so well.

Abstract definition was not much in Mr. Grafton's line, but he rushed upon it with a cheerful confidence that was almost as good as being right.

"A practical life, I take it, is a life given up to action—to deeds that men can see and that civilization advances by—building, mining, railroading, steamboating, manufacturing, inventing—anything and everything that keeps this old

world moving. And success is power, and power, in the nineteenth century, is money. That is the corner-stone of all our American prosperity. Where would society, politics, industries, education, religion itself be without money? Look at me. I'm not what would be called a rich man—Jim will do better than his father—but I have a pretty fair fistful of stocks and bonds and that sort of thing, and every dollar I own represents so much energy—energy for the good of the community, energy at work for the interests of—of the race, if you like to put it broadly. I've a weakness for broad views myself. Now I'm a busy man, full of projects—spend a good share of my life in the steam-cars, send more telegrams than I write letters. But besides my personal business, I'm on a dozen boards and committees, political, charitable, educational—all sorts. I'm a leading citizen. In my own section, sir, I have my thumb in pretty near every pie that's baking, and whatever I put my hand to, that thing goes through. Now I call this living—I call this success. What do you call it?"

Mrs. Yorke emitted a faint murmur of admiration. Her husband, his head resting on his hand, looked steadily into the fading embers, for the boys had forgotten to replenish the fire. Hence all the faces were in shadow.

"Do you read?" asked Mr. Yorke, quietly.

"Why, yes," returned the man of action, with briskness; "of course I do—two or three daily newspapers, besides the Sunday extras. And once in a while I take an airing in the field of general literature, with some such author for company as—as"—

"Plato?" suggested Mr. Yorke.

"Well, Rider Haggard is rather my favorite," admitted Mr. Grafton.

"Do you think?" asked Mr. Yorke, again.

"Think? What with worries and hurries and schemes and calculations, it's a lucky week when I get through it without a nervous headache. I tell you, I'm a champion thinker. That's the way I've made my money."

At this point in the conversation Nick's drowsy head slipped off his mother's knee to the floor, whereupon Robert, rising good-naturedly, set his small brother upon his shoulder and carried him up-stairs to bed. Mrs. Yorke followed to undress the tired little man and softly scratch his pillow until he fell asleep, for the child always insisted upon this peculiar variety of lullaby.

"Yes, sir," repeated James Grafton; "I have done the thing I said I would do. I have lived the life I meant to live. Without vanity, I think I am entitled to call myself a successful man.

Come, now, give me your side of the question. You've not concerned yourself greatly with business, I take it?"

Maurice Yorke colored painfully and answered with hesitation —

"Buying and selling have always been repugnant to me, yet once I invested a few hundred dollars, all I had, in a little bookstore and came out of the venture bankrupt in less than six months' time. I would not sell inferior literature, however much my customers — my would-be customers — called for it, and the best books I often gave away so as to make them known to the souls who needed them. There were people who had new horizons of thought opened to them during those six months; there were people who formed a taste for noble reading, but — yes, financially it must undoubtedly be counted a failure. It was the winter when Rob and Nat — they were little boys then — had but one overcoat between them. My wife remembers it."

"Humph!" said Mr. Grafton; "what else have you tried?"

"More occupations," replied Mr. Yorke, sadly, "than I could recall if I would, or would if I could. For several years I was a teacher, but the committee found me irregular in my methods, and my boys, though it was conceded that they came

to love learning as few boys do, used to have trouble with their college entrance examinations. The committee urged me to pay more regard to technicalities, and for the sake of my family I made the effort; but finally they asked me to resign. I dare say they were in the right. I always found them patient and courteous. But I was sorry to give up my school. I have been adrift, in a sense, ever since. I have held editorships, but never for long at a time. I could not resist trying to elevate the popular taste, instead of gratifying it, and so the sales fell off. At one time I was private secretary to a distinguished politician, but as I refused to take down from his dictation letters which connived at wrong doing, he lost his temper and dismissed me. Then I entered upon a like position with a college president, a man of much scientific scholarship, but with absolutely no sense of English style. I used to correct his rhetoric to such an extent, though invariably for excellent cause, that he failed one day to recognize as his a circular which he had previously dictated to me, and he dissolved our connection. I am sorry to remember the language which he used on that occasion. But I will not weary you further. These few experiences are samples of many. Even as a proof-reader, I failed to give satisfaction, because I would not

conform to the present irrational standards of punctuation. In short, sir, I was beaten at every turn, and so I came here."

"And what in the name of common-sense did you expect to do here?" asked Mr. Grafton, somewhat sharply.

"I meant to write a book," replied Mr. Yorke, with unaltered gentleness; "I have it on hand now. It advances slowly, because I am not always in the mood for it, and then it occasionally happens that my son Robert, who, with his farming and his fishing, is—to my shame I confess it—the main stay of us all, comes to me with a request for money. If the need seems urgent, I lay my book aside and try to write a newspaper article or a magazine sketch. But the book is my chief concern."

"What's the subject?" asked Mr. Grafton.

"I fear," answered Mr. Yorke, with a touch of timidity in his manner, "you would not understand without fuller explanation than I can give you now. It is a universal history, from the botanical standpoint."

"From the what?" demanded Mr. Grafton.

"A universal history, from the botanical standpoint," repeated Mr. Yorke. "It is my own idea that the life of each nation has its perfect type in the vegetable world, in the life of some corre-

spondent plant, and that only as we understand the peculiar laws of germination, growth, blossoming and decay governing each of these prophetic plants, can we at all penetrate into the mysteries of national development. I am convinced that I am working at a profound and hitherto unsuspected truth, but the difficulty at the outset is most serious. It is absolutely essential that there should be no mistake here, but the liability to error is great. The problem is, in brief, to determine with certainty the correspondences—what plants prefigure what nations. I feel the peril and move cautiously—very cautiously. For these last seven years I have merely been making preparatory notes. The book itself, to speak accurately, is not yet begun."

For a moment there was unbroken silence; then Mr. Grafton leaned back in his chair and gave vent to his accumulated feelings in a hearty laugh.

"You had better let me look you up something to do out west," he said; "a place in a library, say. How would that suit? Not much chance to play the crank there, eh? I'll see what I can do for you. I've set many a man on his legs before now. You see I'm a good-natured fellow myself and like to give mired carts a lift out of the mud. But where is my young friend, Miss Dolo, going?"

"Home," responded Dolo, briefly, her hand on the latch; "shall I tell father you are here?"

"N-no," said Mr. Grafton, with a little hesitation in his voice; "I'll announce myself when I come. Shall I be likely to find your father in to-morrow morning?"

"Yes. In the island," replied Dolo, and shut the door behind her.

Nat, who had been leaning against the mantel in the deep shadow which now possessed the room, gave a sudden start, snatched down his hat from the nail under the clock and followed Dolo out into the keen salt air.

"You needn't," came in crisp tones from Dolo's swift-speeding little figure, as the long strides overtook her; "I'm not afraid."

"I am," replied Nat, in a queer, husky voice; "I'm afraid to stay in that room a minute longer."

Dolo looked up curiously into her companion's face. The moonlight betrayed him.

"Nat, you're crying," exclaimed the girl.

"I'm not. I don't care if I am. Don't speak to me," stammered back the tall, ungainly fellow, his voice breaking in something suspiciously like a sob.

They walked on without more words until they reached Mr. Rexford's cottage. A candle shone in a lower window. Dolo knew that Miss Lucas

would be sitting up for her and that the greeting awaiting the tardy comer would be equally void of pleasure and reproach. The prospect was not attractive, and she lingered for a moment on the doorstep, looking away from the yellow little window up to the calm, bright stars. Nathan turned silently to go.

Dolo called after him—

“Nat!”

The lad paused, but held his face averted.

“I know something, Nat.”

“What?”

“A star, even if it can’t be fitted into a candlestick, is better than a candle.”

And with this oracular utterance Dolo vanished into the house.

CHAPTER VII.

WHICH?

I did once read in an old book
Soil'd with many a weeping look,
That the seeds of foul sorrows be
The finest things that are to see.

— HENRY VAUGHAN.

BREAKFAST was over and Mr. Grafton, escorted by Eric, was strolling along the shore. Mr. Grafton walked with his thumbs in his pockets and with just the suggestion of a swagger in his gait. The bare-legged boy beside him took short runs into the waves, splashed noisily through all the pools and rivulets they came upon, and made excited dashes for every little rising in the sand that indicated the presence of a snail. The morning dream of such snug and unsuspecting mollusk was rudely broken by the intrusion of Eric's bare toes, that strove vigorously to

dig him up, while the snail, scrambling close into his shell and indignantly squirting out sea-water over those queer, brown, wriggling tormentors, burrowed with surprising strength and activity to get out of their way. Usually, though not always, the toes came off victorious, and the snail was kicked up into the light and left lying on the surface of the sand to get over his sulky displeasure as best he might. Although the sky was clouded, it was a fresh brave morning, and the dimpled surface of the sea, a quiet green in tint, flashed with silver edges.

“And so,” said Mr. Grafton, “there are only these four families on the island—only thirteen souls of you all. That’s an unlucky number.”

“Well!” said Eric, cheerfully, “we sort o’ count in Bessie an’ Jessie an’ Old Susannah—they’re the cows, you know—and Frisk, that’s our old cat, and the Cap’n’s dog, Major—he’s got a soul—and then there’s Mr. Monk, and the hens and ducks. We make company of the gulls and sandpeeps, too, and at low tide the beach is just covered over with snails and sea-urchins and sand-dollars and jelly-fish. There are horse-shoes, besides, and plenty of clams and crabs, and sometimes a seal gets caught in the surf. And at night it’s awful pretty to see the sand-fleas on the beach—they’re phosphorescent—some of ‘em

just the loveliest green you ever saw. Oh! we don't feel lonesome—'t least, most of us don't. Mother does."

"So you think your island is rather thickly settled, eh?" laughed Mr. Grafton; "well, there's no tent like content to keep one dry in rainy weather. Hello! What have we here?"

Down from the Brimblecomb cottage came trotting a small and stormy figure, brown hair flying, brown eyes tearful, little arms beating the air like wings in time to the rapid movement of black-stockinged little legs. The lumbering form of Cap'n Noll, his big bronzed face wearing a distressed and apologetic expression, followed at a respectful distance. Half way between the house and the water, Baby Merry, hearing the pursuing footsteps draw nearer, turned at bay, the wee fists clenched, the tiny head erect, the soft cheeks flushed, the brown eyes blazing, the rosebud mouth puckered and resolute, the little shoulders back, the slender black legs straight and stiff and the small feet firmly planted in the sand. The very embodiment of angry defiance, the child looked her grandfather in the eye, her whole attitude eloquently declaring, had there only been a boulder at hand for illustration—

"This rock shall fly
From its firm base as soon as I."

"Now, now, chuckie, don't be cross with gramp," pleaded the poor captain.

"You laughed at me," returned Baby, unforgivingly; "and you made me shed tears loud."

"But you were all wrong about gravitation," protested the captain, "and gramp wanted to set you right."

"Wasn't wrong," retorted Baby; "Nick said so."

"What did Nick say?" asked Eric, coming up.

"Nick said," repeated Baby, with vehement little accents and gestures, "that when we jump up in the air, it's our tracks i' th' earth that makes us come down again. And gramp laughs. But 'tis. You just look, now." Whereupon Baby Merry solemnly raised first one foot and then the other, displaying two small prints in the sand. After this preliminary exercise, she gave a little leap upward and then said, with the air of one triumphant by virtue of irrefutable argument—

"There! You see, Eric? I jumped up an' 'twas my tracks i' th' earth that made me come down again. Nick said so. Nick knows. Don't you see?"

"Only to hear the chuckie!" murmured her grandfather, fondly.

Baby flashed a severe look at him, and the

burly captain, feeling himself in disgrace, held his peace. At this instant Nick appeared on the scene and his little playmate eagerly appealed to him for confirmation of her very modern science. But Nick heaved a sigh and clasped his hands despairingly.

“Course I said ‘traction o’ th’ earth. Baby always does get things wrong. She’s so ig’orant, I don’t know what I shall do. I try an’ try to teach her better, but sometimes I’m most discouraged to death.”

Thus deserted by her strong tower of defence, for one brief moment Baby looked crest-fallen, but promptly recovering her self-possession, she tossed her pretty head and, remarking in a nonchalant manner, “I don’t care ‘bout jumping, anyway, an’ I’m going home to get Mr. Monk; he’s nice,” she wheeled about and beheld the unknown form of Mr. Grafton. At the sight of a stranger the brown eyes widened, but being a plucky baby, run she would not. So she stood her ground, although trembling all through her little body. But Mr. Grafton whistled and cooed, made a rabbit out of his handkerchief, and an old woman out of his fist and finally drew his gold watch from the fob and dangled it temptingly in the air.

“Come here, sissy, and let me show you this,” he said, coaxingly.

Baby shook her head, but her gaze, fixed upon the shining, yellow, mysteriously-attractive object, grew eager.

“Say me something pretty now—a little song or story, and I’ll open it and show you how the wheels go round,” proposed Mr. Grafton still more enticingly.

This was too good an offer to be refused. Baby rose to the situation. It was not in vain that Grandma Brimblecomb, every morning for the past winter, had taught her a Scripture text.

“What I say unto you, I say unto all—watch!” the mite recited, solemnly, and marched fearlessly forward, unabashed by the chorus of laughter, to claim her promised reward.

Mr. Grafton, resting on his knee in the sand, good-naturedly snapped open his watch and displayed the works, while Baby Merry and Nick and even Eric pressed tumultuously about him, but at the same time, like the brisk business man he was, he found opportunity to scrape acquaintance with the captain and arrange for transportation, at the turning of the tide, to the mainland. Mr. Yorke had been obliged to refer his guest to Captain Brimblecomb, for some unaccountable pressure of engagements seemed to beset Robert and Nathan that day, and the stranger, to his own evident chagrin and even to Mr. Yorke’s

mild surprise, had been unable to induce either of them to play boatman. It was arranged that Eric should make the trip with Captain Brimblecomb, and then Mr. Grafton, disengaging with some difficulty his valuable watch from its young admirers, went on his way alone toward the Rexford cottage, leaving Baby Merry, altogether radiant, tugging seaweed and brown kelp across the beach or hugging the slippery masses to her heart, while the captain, happy in his restoration to favor, was busily employed in turning up all the unsociable snails and sand-dollars he could find and, by way of "bringing them to the party", depositing them together in a large hole Nick was scooping in the sand. Eric, meanwhile, had given his trousers an extra twitch and dashed out into the surf, where he was running and bounding like a native Triton.

As Mr. Grafton approached the third cottage on the island, he was impressed by its peculiar dreariness of aspect. There was no hint of beauty about it, but there was scarcely anything so pronounced as positive ugliness. It was simply blank, barren, dismal. The loose sand, dotted over with a sparse growth of coarse weeds and grasses, stretched away in a level on three sides from the plain, unpainted, box-like little structure, which was evidently a thing of walls and roof, not

a home—something to keep out weather, not to keep in love. On the fourth side was the short, sandy slope to the beach. A dejected clothesline hung between two sullen poles, and an obstinate washbench stood up to its knees in the sand. The house was without blinds or curtains and not a living creature was in sight.

Shallow hearts are often kind, and the vain-glorious man of affairs, as he remembered the mirth-loving, delicately-reared girl whom he had known and admired in his own sweeter days, had to draw the back of his hand across his eyes once and again before he stepped forward and knocked loudly at the cottage door.

The door was opened by a white-haired, stern-faced man, whom for a moment the visitor failed to recognize. It was the cottager who spoke first.

“James Grafton! You—and here!”

“It is Horace Rexford’s voice,” replied the other; “but where is Horace Rexford?”

Mr. Rexford stood silent for a full moment, his black eyes intently fixed, yet hardly with an expression of welcome, upon his caller.

“Since you are here, come in,” he said at last, and led the way back through the desolate living-room toward the study.

But Mr. Grafton paused to cast a glance about

him, and his face brightened with pleasure as he caught sight of Del, standing in an attitude of frank astonishment, half way down the rough ladder-like stair-case. The girl looked as if she had just sprung forth from a bath of sunshine, and when, under the stranger's gaze, the play of dimples and blushes began, the room seemed to him no longer dull and cheerless, but flooded with the glow of youthful life.

"Mary Rexford!" he exclaimed, involuntarily.

"That was my mother's name," responded Del, smiling down upon him from her elevated and somewhat precarious perch; "I am Del."

"Delia," corrected Mr. Rexford, in a voice that fell strangely on his daughter's ears. "Mary had a fancy to give the child, who was born here, an island-name, and Delia is a derivative from Delos."

"Your other daughter bears a curious name, too," said Mr. Grafton, looking about, but vainly, for Dolo.

"Her name is Dolorosa," said Mr. Rexford, still in that controlled voice with the unwonted depth and pathos in it. "She was born, as you remember, in the days of trouble. Come into the study, James Grafton, if you wish to talk with me."

"But I trust I shall have the happiness of meeting this charming young lady again," said Mr. Grafton, bowing gallantly to the ladder.

Del's blue eyes, the moment before alive with eager curiosity, overflowed with fun, and she gave a fascinating little nod to the stranger, as he somewhat reluctantly followed her father into the study.

The door had scarcely closed behind them, before Del turned upon the ladder, which she had been in the act of descending, and scrambled up again. The little bare feet ran noiselessly over the planking above, and the girlish figure, trembling with excitement, stole into her father's chamber. This was situated directly over the study, where a stove was set up for winter use, and a rude inlet for the heat into the sleeping-room above had been made by cutting a square hole in the floor. This hole was located beneath the bed, and as Del, dropping on hands and knees, crept stealthily toward the aperture, her head came suddenly in contact with another head. With a guilty start and dilated, frightened eyes, Del sprang back, bumping her shoulders, this time, against the bedstead, but in a moment she saw that the other head belonged to Dolo. The two sisters had detected each other in the attempt at eaves-dropping. Black head and golden head had each inflicted and received well-merited chastisement.

Blue eyes and black eyes stared silently into

each other. That was at first. Presently the blue eyes began wistfully to plead the common cause, aided by a soft and eager whisper—

“Yes, I know it’s mean; it’s dreadfully mean. I hope Uncle Maurice will never know it. What would mamma say? O, dear! O, dear! We shouldn’t do such things if mamma were here to love us and teach us how to be good. But father doesn’t love us and will never teach us anything. And there’s so much about dear mamma herself and all her trouble and father’s being so strange and the way everything has gone with us that we really ought to know. We are growing up and there’s nobody here to tell us. So we shall have to listen. It really seems as if we ought to. Listening would be mean sometimes, it would be wrong, if things were with us as they are with other girls—the girls in story-books. But it’s the very only way we can find out about ourselves. And father won’t catch us. And I guess mamma will ask God to forgive us.”

The black eyes flashed as the crisp answer was whispered back—

“Lies! Listening is listening, and it’s mean in us and wrong in us, just as it would be in anybody else, and we’re doing it because we want to, and there’s no ought about it. And we don’t deserve to have God forgive us. I hope we shall

be caught and punished, because that's only fair; but I mean to listen, first, and find out all I can. Then I sha'n't mind the punishing so much."

And the golden head and black head, after this whispered colloquy, bent together by sudden consent over the aperture, one of them, at least, feeling the more comfortable for its bump.

The stranger, wearing a somewhat perturbed expression, was seated in the single chair the room afforded—a hard-bottomed, straight-backed chair of forbidding aspect, placed there for Nat's use during his daily recitations in Calculus. Mr. Rexford sat on a high stool at his desk, facing about angrily upon his visitor.

"Who asked you to come and pry me out?" he was demanding, fiercely. "I have been dead these fourteen years. You know it."

"And this looks to you like a case of disturbing sacred ashes?" asked the other, with ill-timed jocularity. "Are you a second Shakespeare, that a fellow must forbear to 'digg the dust enclosed here', eh?"

"You had always something of the fool about you, Grafton," returned Mr. Rexford, this time with more of contempt than wrath in his manner. "Be enough of a fool this morning to speak the truth and tell me why you have invaded my wilderness. I can't lend you money."

"I care for something besides money, I'd have you know," retorted Mr. Grafton, sullenly; "you were always hard on me, Horace. I cared for Mary, and if she would have married me, she might have been happier than she was; but she loved you and you spoiled her life."

"I spoiled her life!" exclaimed the other, springing to his feet with a passionate movement. "It was she who ruined mine. I was an honest man, poor and proud and all that, moody and morose, if you like, but honest, not ashamed to look any fellow-being in the face. Did I call you a fool? Then what was I, to marry a girl who had never known an ungratified wish in all her life—I, a young cashier on a salary scarcely large enough to pay her dressmaker's bills? Fool! There was never a man such a fool. How I walked the earth as if it were air, in those first months, dreaming of the home, that Paradise on earth, we were to build up together, of the perfect love ours was to be, a beacon-light and glory in the world! I believed—the more fool I!—that all the evil in my bitter, cynical nature was melting away in the sunshine of her daily presence. And if ever man loved woman, I loved Mary. I made her my idol—my religion. I vowed to my own heart to deny her nothing. I threw the forces of my whole being into cher-

ishing that dainty existence of hers. I never dropped a hint as to the limits of my income. I did try to give her a taste for simple life. I coaxed her away with me to this out-of-the-world island for two summers. She was blithe and frolicsome here, always masquerading in one gay costume or another. But she liked the winters better; she liked the concerts and the theatres and the merry parties. Wherever she went, I went with her, and was proud to see her the loveliest and best dressed lady in the room. We kept open house ourselves. There could be only one end to it all. The first time I tampered with the books, I remember, she wondered that my head should ache and sat by me and bathed it through the evening. I prayed all night long that she might never know. I trusted—fool, fool, fool!—that in some impossible way, for the sake of love like mine, a miracle would be wrought and wrong be sanctified to right. I fought off the shameful day as long as mortal could. I played the speculator's game with the courage of desperation. I was within a shaving's width of making a fortune. But the tide turned. The crash came. Creditors pressed. Suspicion was aroused at the bank. The books were examined. My love had slain my honor, my best had proved my worst, and I went to prison, a man disgraced for

life. Through all those convict years, I sent but one message to my wife. I told her that she had turned an honest man into a thief and that I would never look upon her face again. As I had kept my lover's vow, I kept my felon's oath. I would not see her. I would not read her letters. I would not hear her messages. And the week before my sentence was served out, she died."

"Died! Yes, and went to Heaven, where she forgives her murderer," returned the guest, no less excitedly; "but I will never forgive you, Horace Rexford, never. You wronged her from the beginning. How was she to know—she who had been reared in luxury from her cradle—of the need for household economies and little self-denials? You never made a sign. If you had said one word, there wasn't a woman on earth who would have gone without dress, society, everything, more cheerfully than she. It was a cruel wrong to her, I tell you. And as for what came after—well, you simply broke her heart—the lightest, sunniest, most loving heart that ever beat. I have a good wife, no man a better, but I never knew a nature so beautiful as Mary's, and you killed her. Do you suppose I came here for your sake? I wouldn't cross the street for you, Horace Rexford. I came to learn what you were

doing with poor Mary's children, and I have found out."

"What I am doing with Mary's children," repeated Mr. Rexford, harshly, "is to keep them out of reach of Mary's fault. They will never blot a man's good name by their extravagant tastes. They have nothing but the barest necessities of life. I could not do more for them if I would, and I would not if I could. They do not know what money can buy. If their mother had not known, their father would be free of the prison-stain to-day."

"But breeding, education," protested Mr. Grafton. "Would you have Mary's daughters grow up like weeds?"

"There is a woman in the house," returned Mr. Rexford, with an impatient movement; "she keeps them fed and clothed. What more do they need?"

"What more? Everything more," replied Mr. Grafton; "what kind of a woman is she?"

"How should I know? I found her at my house when I went back to it. She had been sent by the physician as nurse to Mary and was staying on with the children. I asked her if she would bury herself with them on a waste island, for poor pay and less gratitude, and she said she would. Probably life had cheated her, too, for

she has stayed here ever since and seems to want nothing but solitude. Yet she is a good drudge enough. And there is a crack-brained schoolmaster, a neighbor, who teaches the children on the island, when the whim takes him. The girls are intelligent, I should judge, and healthy, and, I dare say, happy. I know little about them. I devote most of my waking hours to the closest mathematical study. That exacts strict attention, absorbs my thought and saves me from madness. It is the only thing left that can deliver me from myself."

Mr. Grafton hesitated a moment.

"Horace, will you grant me one favor—for Mary's sake?"

The features of the other contracted with sudden pain. "How am I to say no to that?" he asked, huskily.

"Well, then, let me tell you that I'm just appointed trustee of a flourishing girls' school out in Colorado—I'm quite a prominent man in my State, I'd like you to understand—and I have the privilege, as every trustee has, of sending one scholar free. Now, will you let me educate one of Mary's daughters in the school?"

Mr. Rexford's head had dropped upon his hand.

"Oh, as you please," he answered, wearily; "what is it to me? What is anything to me?"

"And if I come on for her, with a suitable outfit, will you let her go next September?" pursued Mr. Grafton, emboldened by unexpected success.

"To-morrow, for all I care," rejoined the father, looking up with strange, dull eyes; "but there are two of them. Which will you take?"

"Ay, that's the question," responded Mr. Grafton, musingly; "which?"

CHAPTER VIII.

FATHERHOOD.

He that neglects a blessing,
Though he want present knowledge how to use it,
Neglects himself.

— BEAUMONT AND FLETCHER.

THE word had scarcely passed Mr. Grafton's lips, before Dolo, all of whose senses were as keen as a wild creature's, caught the sound of Miss Lucas' step upon the ladder. Knowing that the housekeeper was coming to set Mr. Rexford's room to rights, Dolo began, hastily but silently, to creep by a backward movement out from under the bed. Del followed, and both girls were standing erect, with flushed, guilty faces and excited eyes, when the housekeeper opened the door. But the signs of confusion were too plain to escape the notice of even so indifferent an observer as Miss Lucas. She looked the two sisters over with a more searching scrutiny than they

had ever known from her before, shook her head gravely and motioned them out of the room. The girls themselves had had enough of eaves-dropping and obeyed her gesture readily. Del fled to their own chamber, where she flung herself down upon the floor in a passion of sobs and tears, and Dolo, slipping out of the house, ran along the bluff, as if she were racing with the wind, to the lonely end of the island.

Within the next hour Mr. Grafton took his leave, much disappointed not to meet the girls again, and Mr. Rexford, pacing the shore, watched the boat with gloomy, troubled eyes until it was lost in the distance.

For several days to come, Mr. Rexford was not seen by any one. He locked himself into his study, going out, if at all, under cover of night. Miss Lucas set his meals, often untouched, down by the threshold, and even Nat received no answer to his knock. Del hovered restlessly about the closed door and listened for sounds from the silent room. Dolo crouched outside in a patch of tall grasses and watched the blank, empty window. But one morning, something less than a week after the memorable visit, there came an hour when Horace Rexford, by a despairing sweep of the arm, thrust all his papers from him and confessed himself defeated. The purely intellectual

realm of mathematics, in which the self-tormenting heart had been wont to lose consciousness of itself, had refused to shelter him longer. He had wrought out during the week laborious and intricate calculations, but he had not for one instant lost the sense of pain. The man acknowledged himself beaten, lifted his haggard face to the window, realized that the sun was shining and walked feebly out of his room, past the awed and pleading face of Del, toward the cottage door, where he staggered, reeled and fell fainting across the step.

When Mr. Rexford opened his eyes, the first sight they beheld was Del's sweet little face, full of pity and concern, bending over him. Something like a smile softened the lines of the austere mouth, but he dropped his lids again and waited for strength to rise. It was a new and not unpleasing sensation, as he lay thus motionless, to feel light, girlish touches bathing his forehead and gently pushing back the masses of white hair. It was really Dolo who was rendering this service, but Mr. Rexford thought only of Del, confusing her face and her mother's in his weary mind and vaguely wondering why the blue eyes should be so clouded by distress.

From this incident may be dated a change in Mr. Rexford's bearing toward his daughters, and

a deeper change in his own spirit. He would sometimes say of himself, in after years, that his whole life had known but four successive moods. In early manhood he had been the soul of proud reserve and scrupulous integrity. During his few years of wedded happiness, all his faculties had been bent to the one task of ministering not only to the needs and desires, but equally to the light caprices of his winsome, fanciful, child-hearted lady-love. But from the moment when the shock of criminal accusation came upon him, when the delicate and irregular method—as he had styled it to himself—by which he was striving to surprise a fortune, was suddenly arrested by discovery and blazoned abroad as theft, the sweetness of his ideal devotion had been turned to bitterness itself and he had allowed his heart no hour of relenting toward the girl-wife who had so innocently caused the wreck of his honorable career. If he could have watched the passion of her grief and self-reproach through the long, silent, cruel years of his imprisonment, if he could have seen, even at the last, the yearning in those dying eyes that turned at every slightest sound toward the door of the sick-chamber, hoping against hope for the face that never came, Horace Rexford would have earlier understood which of these twain had sinned against the other. But it was not until

he lifted his heavy lids that summer morning and looked full into the troubled blue eyes bent over him, that the tide of the strong man's wrath was stayed and slowly began to turn. The eyes were so like Mary's. The last time he had gazed into hers was while his guilt was still known to no mortal save himself and then they had been dancing with merry mischief. A new vision was now dawning upon him—a vision of those blue eyes hollow and tearful, a vision of that sunny face wistful and worn. He offered stubborn resistance to this unlooked-for mood of remorseful tenderness, he concealed it with a certain sense of mortification, he scoffed at it and strove to escape from it; but it conquered. Yet although the process was so gradual and in the main so secret, from the outset the girls felt the difference.

Del, in whose sympathetic nature a warm, impulsive pity for her father had suddenly sprung to life, recognized the fact that his attention was often fixed upon her. He spoke to her as rarely as before, but when he heard her voice, he would sometimes turn and look toward her strangely, as if expecting to see another in her place. Once or twice she had observed him watching her from the study window. Again and again she found his glance, stern, melancholy, thoughtful, fastened upon her at the table. She was pleased to be

noticed, glad to be felt, and yet, eager as she was growing for the right to comfort her father, she did not dare make any open attempt to win his favor.

Mr. Rexford's interest in Dolo was slighter than his attraction toward Del, yet in those weeks when the conviction was crystallizing within him that he had but followed one error by an error tenfold greater, that upon the wrong which he had done to his trustful child-wife by unwisdom in love, he had heaped a crushing wrong in his denial of love, it was natural that, brooding over his long unhappiness, he should mark the dark little face so like his own, and wonder if such sin and suffering as the father's might be in store for the child. "She needs a stricter training than I had in my youth," he would say to himself, and so it came to pass that Mr. Rexford, while still maintaining his habit of non-interference in regard to Del—for had he not, he asked himself, brought tears enough into blue eyes like hers—would often astonish the little household by sharp criticisms upon Dolo's conduct and sudden prohibitions of her intended movements.

At such times Dolo would submit in silence, eying her mentor somewhat grimly, but without active resentment. After all, it was more diverting to be scolded than to be let alone, and Dolo,

while she understood her father's story too well, because of her own resemblance to him, to be swept away, like Del, upon a current of all-forgiving pity—while she more or less clearly recognized the selfishness of that pride which had lain at the root of both his cardinal mistakes, had an inkling, too, of the intensity of his misery, past, present and to come. And to Dolo's eyes pain, like helplessness, bore a flag of truce. The weak and the woeful were safe with her. She had echoed from the depths of her childish heart every one of the stranger's angry, accusing sentences to her father, and yet, when she daily saw the signs of suffering deepening upon that father's face, not even her passionate devotion to her mother's memory could withhold her from softening toward him. She began to count him in her thoughts with Baby Merry and the Hermit—those who were in need of something that she could give. Just what she could do for the gloomy and isolated man whom she had thus taken under her young protection was at first far from evident, but in time the girl began to find little ways of ministering to his comfort, liking to feel, as she dusted his books when he was out or placed fresh flowers upon his desk, that her mother would be glad to have him so cared for. Mr. Rexford's keen eye quickly noted the

improved condition of his bookshelves and these shy attempts at decoration, but he said nothing. It never occurred to him that Dolo might be the good fairy of his study. He took it for granted that it was Del.

Meanwhile the father, new as he was to the exercise of parental responsibility, did not fail to reflect upon the conundrum which the eminent trustee of the Colorado select boarding-school for young ladies had left to his solution. Which? Since his own scanty means afforded no hope of an education for both the girls, unless, as James Grafton had obtrusively suggested, he should return to the world which had disgraced him and should put his mathematical genius, the one solace of his exile, out to hire—an alternative impossible, unthinkable—it was evident that one of the sisters must be selected for advantages, social as well as mental, far above what would fall to the lot of the other. But which?

The more Mr. Rexford pondered upon this enigma, the more difficult it grew. "If I only knew my children," he sighed, wearily, "I could tell at once." In the same instant it flashed across his mind that if he had only sought to know and love his children and had won their love and sympathy in return, there might again be the touch of gentle hands upon his throbbing temples

—for he was rarely free from headache in these later months—there might be sweet and blithe companionship in his lonely strolls and the grace and tenderness of household intercourse about his dreary hearth. He was smitten with a sudden sense of loss hitherto unreckoned, a craving before unrecognized or disregarded. Displeased with his own emotions—always an uncomfortable situation—Mr. Rexford rose with an air of determination from the high stool at his study desk and strode out into the living-room to consult with Miss Lucas.

Del and Dolo were at their studies or sports somewhere out of doors, and Miss Lucas, in a large calico apron, was making ready the frugal dinner. She was filling a row of four bowls with milk, pouring this in from a tin pan, not without peril to the coarse but spotless table-cloth, when Mr. Rexford appeared in the study door-way. This taciturn gentleman was by no means in the habit of asking his housekeeper for advice, and so, sped by embarrassment, he dashed into the subject with undue precipitation.

“I am planning to send one of my daughters away to boarding-school in September. I shall keep her there for several years. There is an especial opportunity offered for one, but only for one. Which shall it be?”

Miss Lucas deliberately finished pouring the milk into the bowls, never spilling a drop. When she raised her head, she displayed the same imperturbable countenance that Mr. Rexford had seen for seven years—a countenance that altered no more under his startling announcement than did the broad, calm surface of the bread-plate. Her answer in its even impartiality suggested the fair-minded attitude of the twin-handled cracker-jar that stood in the middle of the table.

“If it is for several years, why not send one half the time and one the other half?”

Mr. Rexford, naturally indignant with Miss Lucas for thinking of so simple an expedient before it had occurred to him, replied with some asperity—

“That would not do at all. Two halves of two educations do not equal the whole of one. It would be like giving two measures of seed in exchange for one measure of seed and the harvest. I hoped you might have some better suggestion to offer.”

Miss Lucas cast her meditative glance upon a plate of delicious-looking gingerbread that stood, with a perceptible air of distinction upon it, in the envious shadow of the cracker-jar.

“You might ask Mrs. Captain Brimblecomb. She’s very kind. She sent in that gingerbread.

And she seems to take an interest in the girls."

Mr. Rexford mused upon this counsel while he was quietly partaking of his bowlful of cracker and milk, Miss Lucas and the girls, these last coming in flushed and happy from their morning lessons with Uncle Maurice, eating in silence also. Once Mr. Rexford broke the stillness by an imperious request to Dolo not to twist about in her chair, but that was all. He was too much absorbed in his new problem to give the poor child's table-manners their usual allowance of paternal fault-finding. Should he, or should he not, go to the trouble of consulting Mrs. Brimblecomb? The gingerbread, which Mr. Rexford tasted critically, seconded the housekeeper's proposal. If Mrs. Brimblecomb's ideas were as good as her cooking, Mr. Rexford felt that it might be well worth his while to call upon her, although such neighborly intercourse was painfully remote from his custom. But he saw more and more clearly, as he consumed his spicy corner-section of the gingerbread, that Miss Lucas was in the right. Mrs. Brimblecomb was undoubtedly the woman upon the island to whom the little gypsies gave the most of their scanty indoor society, and she had had daughters of her own. Mrs. Yorke had sons only and seemed to be querulous. Mr. Rexford had always

disliked querulous women. They made him impatient. With the last mouthful of gingerbread he decided to call upon Mrs. Brimblecomb and, being a man of action when his energies were once aroused, put his purpose into effect directly after dinner.

As Mr. Rexford walked along the sandy path beneath the windows of the Brimblecomb cottage, on his way to the front piazza, he heard a shrill little voice protesting from the dining-room.

“I don’t want any dessert, grandma. I don’t like dessert. But if I were a little mousie an’ had a wicked grandma that wouldn’t give me my dessert, I’d creep an’ creep an’ creep to the pantry an’ eat everything in it all up.”

“It’s naughty to talk to your grandma that way,” piped another child-voice, reprovingly; “I sha’n’t play with you, if you’re naughty. You’ll have to play alone with Mr. Monk.”

“Mr. Monk is as dry as his bones,” responded the other and more vivacious little voice; “an’ he don’t know any stories to tell me ‘cept just that one ‘bout the poor pussy that was chased by a dog an’ killed till it was dead. You read me that book you writed about the bokhart.”

And a wan ghost of the amused smile that had not been seen on Mr. Rexford’s face since Del was a prattling baby flitted across his eyes and

lips, as the second voice obediently began in a serious-toned recitative—

The Best History of Bokhart Town.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

BY THE AUTHOR, NICHOLAS YORKE.

VOLUME ONE.

IN SEVEN CHAPTERS.

CHAPTER I.

BOKHARTS DISCOVERED.

One day a man's little boy said that he wanted the alphabet in blocks as you see here, A B C D E F G H I J K L M N P Q R S T U V W X Y Z, but when he had brought them all home, his little boy said O was not there. So he had to go and find O. So he went, with some other men to help him. After a while, he found a round thing, which he thought what he wanted. So he took it up and it bit him. The men carried guns with them and they shot it. 'He is a bokhart,' they cry.

CHAPTER II.

BOKHART TOWN.

One day when a boy was walking around the country, he saw a lot of holes. So he went on to see what it was, and found that

there were bokharts in them. ‘This is Bokhart Town,’ he said, taking off his hat and running away.

CHAPTER III.

BOKHART'S POWERS.

The bokhart is a being very lively and very wonderful. This is his power—fly higher than kite, fly faster than birds, dig holes deeper than men, eat everything but dogs and cats, which can eat him.

CHAPTER IV.

But Mr. Rexford, coming to himself with a start, passed on to the piazza, where the captain’s wife, her cheery, rosy, kind old face wearing a comical look of undisguised astonishment, met him at the door. Yet even while, refusing to be seated, he was briefly making known the object of his call, the treble of the childish voices still echoed in his ears, although Nick and Baby Merry, with frightened, wondering little faces, were peeping at him silently from either side of Grandma Brimblecomb’s ample skirts. Nick had dropped upon the floor the veracious history of which he was sole author, printer, publisher and reader, and as Mr. Rexford’s eye fell upon the funny bits of pages, marked over with black, deformed capitals, the thought that nothing could

make up to a father for having lost the childhood of his children still knocked at his heart.

This thought came first with the old, bitter resentment against the prison-walls, but Mr. Rexford's mental temper was too logical not to bring before him in immediate sequence a picture of two tiny maidens, homesick and terrified, whom in a dull November twilight he had lifted out of Captain Brimblecomb's dory and set down upon the sandy beach of Hermit Island. He had scarcely known more of them for the seven years since that date than for the seven years before, and the latter deprivation was by his own choice — his own decree. This unwelcome train of reflection distracted Mr. Rexford's attention and made it even more difficult than he had anticipated to explain his errand to the beaming-faced, roly-poly, motherly little dame before him.

But before he was half through, the white head was nodding sagely and the chubby hands were making sympathetic gestures.

“I see. I see. But which shall it be? Oh, dear, dear, dear! I wish the cap'n was at home, but he's out fishing. He has a sound head of his own, the cap'n, though he's foolish on some points, as men-folks are.”

“I did not come to consult your husband,”

replied Mr. Rexford, impatiently; "I came to consult you."

"Ho, ho, ho! What would the cap'n say to hear that?" cried the little old lady, with a rollicking laugh, shaking her plump sides in huge enjoyment. "Bless you! He thinks the sun rises and sets for him and his lobster-pots. It's mostly the way with men-folks. But they can't help it, I guess. It's in the grain. And so you came to consult me. That's what I call real neighborly, now. I wish you were taken this way oftener. Sit right down on the steps and have a glass of raspberry shrub, while we talk it all over. Do, now."

Mr. Rexford hesitated and then, to his own profound astonishment, consented. The children, made happy by two clam-shells full of the bright-colored fluid, retired with Mr. Monk to the further side of the piazza, but continually reappeared, like April sunshine, peeping with speculative eyes around the corner of the house at this most remarkable spectacle of the island ogre sitting peacefully on the steps, with a red-stained goblet in his hand, and listening with grave attention to Grandma Brimblecomb's rambling, smiling, innocent chatter.

But Mr. Rexford did not find it easy to obtain from his loquacious hostess any definite expres-

sion of opinion. At last, pressed for an answer, she said, reluctantly—

“Well, Mr. Rexford, on the whole and take it all in all, I should choose Del. She’s one to make her way among strangers anywhere. That she is—the pretty dear! To be sure, the cap’n will miss her. We all shall, for the matter of that, but the cap’n dotes on those blue eyes of hers. But if you should send away Dolo, I don’t know, between you and me, what our Baby there would do without her. She would cry her little heart out, it’s likely.”

Mr. Rexford was conscious of an unexpected thrill of pain at this advice. It suddenly occurred to him that his own house would be lonely without Del. He knit his brows, as he replied—

“But you are considering the question from your own standpoint, Mrs. Brimblecomb, not from that of my daughters. I wish to learn which of them would probably profit more by education—not which your household would miss the less.”

“Sure enough,” assented Grandma Brimblecomb, soothingly; “human nature is just as selfish, in the natural state, as lobsters are green. Dear, dear! But this is perplexing enough. Now you do this, Mr. Rexford. You go right along over to the next house and ask Mr. Yorke. He’s the one to tell you which of the girls would set

most store by schooling. Hasn't he been their teacher all these years? And that man's judgment — bless you — I never knew a man with more judgment! He always has a good stock on hand for his neighbors, too, because he never by any chance spends the least grain of it on his own affairs. Poor Mrs. Yorke! But then — dear me! She uses the wrong tackle with the man. Now you go straight along and ask him."

Mr. Rexford was not accustomed to being told to go straight along and do anything, but the justice of consulting the children's teacher was evident. Yet he had already strained his new sociability nearly as far as it would bear, and the look that he cast toward the further cottage, as he strode down the Brimblecomb steps, was not of a reassuring character. It so happened, however, that Mr. Yorke was at that moment strolling along the beach in his slow, reflective fashion, this being one of the numerous holidays observed in the Go-As-You-Pleas Academy, and Mr. Rexford, catching sight of the gentlemanly, stooping figure, with the hands clasped behind the back, turned and followed it with determined steps. The interview between the two men was briefer, however, than the consultation over the glasses of raspberry shrub, and here Mr. Rexford expressed himself with his habitual causticness, while Mr. Yorke,

turning those deep, wise, tender eyes of his upon this neighbor whose face he had been wont to see scarcely oftener than that of the Hermit, listened without interruption to the abrupt and bitter sentences.

“I brought them here to sequester them from the vanities and falsities of the world, and now I have been fool enough to promise to undo half my work—to promise that one of them shall be sent back. You ought to be able to tell, you who have wasted so much breath in teaching them what they were as well off not to know—for when did learning ever make one man good and happy—much less a woman? Oh, not that I fail to recognize your kindness in the matter—but all life is such child’s play—yes, you ought to be able to tell, I say, which of these wild Arabs of mine is the more ready to inherit that budget of prejudices and ignorances known as a modern education. I am not a patient man, sir, and I beg of you to make your answer to the point.”

Mr. Yorke reflected silently, while several great waves flowed and ebbed. Then he said—

“Since you ask for a direct answer, I should advise you to send Dolo. The child has a keen, truth-loving intelligence, and she needs more inlets of life. Del is equally capable, though on different lines, but hers is a nature that gathers

joy, as a bee gathers honey, from any field it ranges."

Mr. Rexford was again surprised to detect in himself certain stirrings of pleasure or, at least, relief at this counsel, which he would have accepted on the spot, but Mr. Yorke was still pondering the question, as if unsatisfied, and suddenly spoke once more.

"A word has come to me, my friend. There is one way, and but one, to invest this single gift with double grace. Leave the choice to the girls themselves. Then will the one who goes be favored, but the one who stays will be blest. Ah, yes; that is the only way. Be guided by my intuition here, dear sir. Leave the choice to the girls themselves."

Mr. Rexford tapped his foot discontentedly upon the hard sand.

"But what does it matter to me?" he said. "What does anything matter to me? That way is as good as another. I will leave it to them."

CHAPTER IX.

IN THE MOONLIGHT.

The wand'ring moon,
Riding near her highest noon,
Like one that had been led astray
Through the heaven's wide, pathless way,
And oft, as if her head she bowed,
Stooping through a fleecy cloud.

— JOHN MILTON.

YET it was not for several weeks yet—not until the time of full moon had come again, that Mr. Rexford broached the question to his daughters. Meanwhile they had been waiting, wondering, expecting—Del with a buoyant, hopeful curiosity, Dolo with a sick foreshadowing of disappointment. They had spoken together of the matter once, and only once. It was a sultry afternoon, sultry even on the island, when Del, almost stumbling over her sister, who was lying in the tall grass under the shadow of the house, had dropped down beside her and, nestling her golden head against the unresponsive

little shoulder, had whispered, with a scared glance in the direction of the study window—

“Dolo, do you suppose Miss Lucas told father that we listened at the hole and so he decided not to send either of us to school?”

But all the satisfaction Del obtained was the languid query in response—

“What’s the use of supposing? Besides, it’s too hot.”

The evening on which the interview finally came was the evening when the girls were least expecting it. They had lingered about the room for a few minutes after tea, but Mr. Rexford, who had been standing in the doorway gloomily regarding the play of delicate rose-tints and pearl-tints in the western sky, had suddenly turned, looked at his daughters with a frowning glance, chidden Dolo for her awkward posture and disappeared within his study. As it was the rarest of events for that study door to open again, after once closing for the evening, the children had started out to solace themselves for hope deferred by the social attractions of the island. The Brimblecomb cottage was the one honored by their presence, and here they passed a merry hour, popping corn over the open fire with the rosy, smiling, indulgent grandma, while Cap’n Noll, big and brown and blustering, sat by and stoutly told the

most impossible sea-stories to which the elasticity of human imagination could be stretched, and Baby Merry trotted about with shining eyes, absorbed in vain attempts to induce first Major and then Mr. Monk to partake of the flaky kernels that her daring little fingers snatched hot from the popper.

Then came the patter of bare feet over the piazza, the ring of boyish voices on the air, and in trooped the army of the house of Yorke, Eric, his bright face glowing with eagerness, leading the way —

“Such a jolly moonlight night! And the tide getting higher every minute! What are you all indoors for?”

“Fact!” added Nat, who came second in the file, knocking off Eric’s cap with one hand and removing his own with the other; “prettiest full moon I’ve seen for — for a month!”

Robert, who brought up the rear, said nothing, but he pulled off his old straw hat, the brim now gone entirely, to Grandma Brimblecomb and the girls, nodded to Cap’n Noll, stooped and kissed Baby Merry, who allowed no other one of the elder boys to take that liberty, patted Major and even gave Mr. Monk’s cotton-flannel tail a friendly tweak in passing.

“But where is my little lad?” asked Grandma

Brimblecomb, while Baby Merry, pouting, ran and threw open the door, which Robert had closed behind him, and peeped with expectant little face out into the dusk.

“Sure enough!” replied absent-minded Nat; “where is the kid?”

“Nice sort of brother you are!” laughed Eric.

Grandma Brimblecomb glanced anxiously at Robert.

“Nick is ailing to-night, Grandma,” the big fellow said, smiling down into the faded, kindly eyes with his own frank look; “and that’s the reason why I came over. There’s no trusting Nat with a message, and to-night the moonshine has gone to Eric’s head. But Nick’s throat is bad again, and mother is so worried I thought maybe you would run over and take a look at the little chap, just to make mother rest easy.”

“Go, grandma, go and make Nick well,” entreated Baby Merry, tugging importunately at her grandmother’s skirts.

“Oh, it’s nothing, chick-a-dee,” said Robert, lightly, lifting the child up to his broad shoulder; “Nick will be all well in a day or two. And you will be a good girl and let gramp put you to bed, while your grandma comes home with me and makes poor Nick better, won’t you? That’s a dear.”

But Merry's devotion did not extend to such lengths as this.

"No, I won't," she answered, promptly, resting her pink cheek demurely against Robert's brown hair; "but I'll let gramp wrap me all up warm in his jacket and carry me down to the shore to see moony. And I won't be naughty all the while grandma's gone, for gramp can't manage me."

And with this concession the family were forced to be content.

The popcorn being speedily disposed of, largely by dint of Eric's manful exertions, a procession was formed for the beach, Cap'n Noll leading the way with his imperious little granddaughter in his arms, and Mr. Monk in hers, Major keeping close to the captain's heels, Eric following with Del, and Nat with Dolo. Robert, upon whose strong young arm Grandma Brimblecomb was leaning, guided the old lady's steps toward his home by a higher path than that which the others had taken, so that the two parties were soon separated.

"Good-by, Rob!" called Eric, cheerfully; "tell Nick it's an awful shame he can't see this moonlight and this tide."

"You talk as if you were chief ticket-seller for Nature's show," laughed back Robert; "better put more of your admiration in your eyes and less in your tongue."

"That's what a fellow gets for being poetical," remarked Eric to Del, with a comical attempt at a sigh; "he gets snubbed by the cold world—specially his own folks."

"Never mind; it would take a deal of snubbing to kill you," returned Del, reassuringly; "but don't try to be poetical, you harum scarum boy! It doesn't seem natural, not one bit."

"Do you like me as well as if I were poetical?" asked Eric, whom the moonlight appeared to have struck with sentimentality.

"I like you best of all when you whistle," replied Del, with wisdom beyond her years.

And the air resounded at once with the melody of "Marching through Georgia".

"Why didn't *you* take grandma to Nick?" asked Dolo, sharply, of Nat, nodding her head in the direction of Robert's retreating figure.

"Well!" stammered Nat, in his dazed fashion, "you see—you see—Rob has rather the monopoly of that sort of thing and I don't like to interfere. He does the righteousness for the family, just as Eric does the beauty. Nick—he does the innocence so far, and I—I'm going to do the deliverance."

"What do you mean by that?" demanded Dolo.

"What I say," returned Nat, stammering no

longer and with the haze in his eyes dispelled by a sudden flashing look ; "I'm going to get off this pin-point of an island before I'm many months older, and then I'll somehow fix it for the rest of 'em to come, too. Rob's idea of virtue is to stand everything. Mine isn't. Mine is to do something."

"Do you remember the moonlight path we saw last month?" asked Dolo, abstracted in her turn.

"Yes," said Nat, gloomily ; "but it didn't come to anything. Nothing comes of itself. One has to make things come."

"The company will now sit down!" shouted Eric.

"Sit down!" echoed Baby Merry, fiercely.

And down upon the sand they dropped, one and all, like so many upset ninepins.

"Now, moon, come out from behind those clouds," called Eric, the showman ; "we're all waiting."

"Come right out, moony," chimed in his piping second.

But the moon took her own time of state, and even Eric was forced to wait with what patience he could command.

It was a night superb in beauty. The sea was silvery, the cloud-flecked sky pale amethyst. Sud-

denly the full-orbed moon, bursting through a rift in the tremulous cloud-curtain, overflowed all the heaven with radiant beams.

"It's like the sun drawing water," said Dolo.

"No, no," said Del, eagerly, but half under her breath; "don't you see? Doesn't anybody see? 'The heavens opened and the Spirit like a dove descending'—it is like that."

And then they all kept silence for a little, until Baby Merry was moved to make the hopelessly mundane remark—"Moony has cloudy bangs," when the silence was shattered against a peal of laughter.

There was not much talking, however, even after that. A little jesting came to pass at Eric's expense, when Del, asking him to sit on the other side of her to keep the wind away, was puzzled by the ungallant hesitation of her usually most blithe young cavalier. The fatal fact finally leaked out that the boy was reluctant to turn toward her the left side of his face, because it had across the ruddy cheek a disfiguring scratch, received that morning from the claws of the sedate old Frisk, who had her limits beyond which teasing would not be tolerated.

"That's the way with you good-looking people," growled Nat, while the girls laughed softly and poor Eric hung his discomfited head and blushed

crimson; "what would you do if you had to carry round my homely phiz all the time, eh?"

Then Nat, having growled his growl, good-naturedly rolled Eric over in the sand and assumed the office of wind-umbrella himself.

But in general there was a quiet tone upon the little conversation that was passed, and not much laughter, the wonderful beauty of sky and sea solemnizing the sensitive young hearts. Even Baby Merry felt the spell and startled her grandfather, against whose breast her little form was snugly nestled, by the sudden inquiry—

"Gramp, is God's last name or God's first name Hallowéd?"

"What, chuckie?" asked Cap'n Noll, in dismay.

"Grandma always says," explained Baby, "Hallowéd be thy name. She says it to God. Now I want to know if his name is God Hallowéd or Hallowéd God."

"His name is just God, dearie," said Cap'n Noll, patting the little hand that grasped his rough coat-collar; "you'll understand when you are older."

"No, I don't," said Baby, after a moment's pause; "I'm older now—a little—and I don't understand."

There were signs of tears in the sleepy voice and Dolo held out her arms.

"Come and tell me a story," she said, with that quiet authority of hers to which the perverse little maiden always so gladly yielded.

But as Baby Merry, resting contentedly within the slender arms that clasped her not too tightly, began in a dreamy chant to relate such heaven-legend as her childish imagination conceived under the influences of the night, Dolo rocked slowly back and forth, until the drowsy murmurs softened into silence.

"Christ flewed up to Heaven, flewed an' flewed an' flewed, an' there he met Angel of Lord, an' there was shining stars (bars, tars, ars) an' there was pretty moony (loony, doony, oony) an' Angel of Lord said, 'Praised be you—praised be you—praised be you for these beauties!'"

"Let me take her now," begged Cap'n Noll, in a gusty whisper; "she's fast asleep and she's too heavy for you."

"In a minute," replied Dolo, waiting until the moon had passed behind a cloud heavier than the rest. Then in the partial darkness she pressed a hasty kiss on the moist waves of soft brown hair and gave over the little burden to the captain's eager hold.

After this they all sat silent, watching for the moon to reappear. The great cloud seemed to throb with its secret of glory. Its translucent

walls took on changing tints of crystal, pearl and silver. The sky beyond was hushed in expectancy. The further edges of the cloud began to shimmer, to shine, to burn in golden splendor against the surrounding night. A flood of purest light heralded the queenly coming, the bright cloud-edges melted and dazzled away, and the moon was visible once more—speeding in serenest, most majestic beauty across a lake of sapphire.

“The moon doth with delight
Look round her when the heavens are bare,”

quoted a sweet, grave voice behind the group.

“Uncle Maurice!” cried Del.

“Papa!” exclaimed Eric.

Then as they all glanced up toward him, they saw how white he looked and weary. He turned away from the children to Cap'n Noll.

“I have just taken your kind wife home, sir,” he said, lowering his voice, which was never loud, as he observed the sleeping child in the captain's arms. “My poor little son has had an attack of acute distress and difficulty in breathing, and as his mother was nearly beside herself with anxiety, I do not know what we should have done without the invaluable aid of Mrs. Brimblecomb. I am much to blame. I am much to blame. I should

have seen to it that the boy was in a better climate before this. I should at least have put my family within reach of a physician."

Del was on her feet in an instant, nestling to Uncle Maurice's side and clinging to his hand. But Dolo shrugged her shoulder and said in a mocking undertone to Nat.

"Your father always says that when Nick has one of his gasping spells. This is the third time I've heard him since Christmas."

"If you were a boy, I'd fight you," returned Nat, between his teeth, flushing in the moonlight; "since you're a girl, I can only clear out. Good-night."

And Nat, scrambling to his feet in hot displeasure, started off across the sands for home, where he found Eric already arrived and kneeling affectionately by the side of a pallid-faced little figure that rested across Robert's knees, the mother, her gray hair falling loose, supporting the small head, while she herself was supported by the stalwart arm of her eldest son.

Meanwhile Mr. Yorke was gazing with troubled eyes out upon the glorious panorama of sea and sky, reiterating to Cap'n Noll, in words of whose utterance he was himself hardly conscious, his appreciation of Grandma Brimblecomb's services.

"Ay, the little woman — she's a tidy craft for

any sea," said the captain, cheerily, rearing his great bulk to an erect posture with the tenderest care not to awaken the baby-girl on his arm; "an' as for doctorin', you don't easily find her beat. She used to be in charge o' the medicine chest, when we were both spryer than we are now an' she made the voyages with me, and the men liked to be sick better than not—the lazy lubbers! Oftentimes, like enough, 'twas essence o' rope's end they needed more than any of her cherry cordial or blackberry syrup—but what's the odds? The ship was no loser, in the long run. There never was danger o' mutiny on a craft that carried the little woman. Not that I would say all this to her, mind you. A man must be master in his own house, as on his own deck, an' I make a point o' never letting the women-folks get the upper hand."

Then Cap'n Noll rolled away to his cozy cottage, Uncle Maurice turned sadly homeward, and Del and Dolo, finding themselves left alone, decided that it was time to seek their own domicile. They walked a little apart, and silently, as their custom was. Del was divided between pity for Nick and sympathy with Uncle Maurice, Dolo was remembering, with a smile at the corners of her strange little mouth, Nat's flash of anger, and yet the thoughts of both were vaguely enveloped

in a certain ever-present consciousness of the beauty of the night. For once, neither was thinking of the revelations and possibilities resulting from Mr. Grafton's visit to the island.

When they reached their door, Del lightly lifted the rude latch and, with one of her natural courtesies, stepped aside to let Dolo enter first. In sudden freakishness, Dolo slammed the door behind her and held down the latch from within.

"Let me in!" called Del, indignantly, pushing against the door.

"Say the table of thirteens backward," demanded Dolo.

"I won't," replied Del, in a passion.

"You shall, and you shall say the column of English kings upside down, besides," returned the too-ingenuous warder.

"Please, Dolo," was the only response from without, but in a tone whose pathos, though failing to stir the wicked brown fingers grasping the latch, brought help from an unexpected quarter.

A heavy hand from out the darkness smote upon Dolo's shoulder. Thoroughly frightened for once, the girl sprang back with a half-stifled cry and struck against the tall form of her father.

"Oh! It's you!" she exclaimed, in a curious tone that impressed her father as insolent; "I guess I'd rather it would have been a bogey."

"How dare you treat your sister in this way?" thundered Mr. Rexford, shaking Dolo with violence as he flung her from him. Then he opened the door himself and drew Del in.

Dolo, in all her life of fourteen years, had never known rough handling. Her father's frowning looks and harsh rebukes she could bear with sullen patience, but this sent the blood rushing so wildly through her veins that her head grew dizzy and her chest panted until she could scarcely speak. But speak she did, as she stood quivering with wrath, a slender black figure, in the one broad ray of moonlight that crossed the else unlighted room.

"I wish I were a man. I would shake you back again."

"Be silent."

"I will not be silent for you. Why should I?"

"I am your father."

"You have insulted me. That makes it even."

"You are impertinent."

"Is it impertinent to speak the truth?"

"It is impertinent to speak truth or falsehood in that tone."

"It's the same tone you shook me in."

"I was punishing you for doing wrong."

"You did wrong yourself."

"You are speaking to your father."

"I'm speaking to the man who went angry and shook me."

At the bottom of all his pride, Mr. Rexford had a keen sense of justice. The explosive sentences from that defiant little figure in the moon-beam failed to exasperate him. On the contrary, they suggested to the newly-awakened fatherly sense in his heart a desire to deal fairly by the child. And so, with a masculine faith in the power of pure reason, he put to test the saving grace of logic.

"Listen to me a moment, as quietly as you can. Didn't you do very wrong to shut the door upon your sister?"

"No, sir; not very wrong. She was only teasing," interposed Del, eagerly.

"Was it wrong or right, Dolorosa?" pursued Mr. Rexford.

"An imp in me did it," said Dolo, sullenly; "and you shook him, and he's grown into a devil."

Mr. Rexford felt his logic disconcerted. He hesitated and then, with a sudden revulsion of feeling, said in a despondent tone—

"You are right. I am unfit to guide you. But try for your mother's sake to do as she would wish."

The slender figure in the moon-beam wavered,

then made a sudden step forward into the shadow. "I think she would wish me to ask your pardon—and Del's."

This was so extraordinary, coming from Dolo, that Del sat down on the edge of the wood-box and cried in the dark. Mr. Rexford, also in the dark, leaned up against a cupboard and began to suspect that he really had remarkable governing ability. But no one was quite so much astonished at Dolo's surrender as was Dolo herself.

Under these improved circumstances, Mr. Rexford bethought him that he might do well to bring forward the subject of subjects. So he cleared his throat impressively and began—

"Now that this unpleasantness is well over"—but Dolo in the darkness was rubbing an aching shoulder—"for I am sure you understand, Dolorosa, that both Delia and myself"—

"Oh, yes, yes, yes!" sobbed Del, vehemently.

"At all events," continued Mr. Rexford, somewhat taken aback by the interruption, "I am as sorry for my passionate moment as I believe you are for yours. The fact is, you both need wiser training than any man—much less a man like my unhappy self—can give, or can secure for you on this barren little island. The opportunity has presented itself through the—the personage who visited here a while since, for one of you to be

educated in a Colorado boarding-school of which he is trustee. Humph! I trust the boarding-school is more cultured than the trustee. But that is neither here nor there. This is, as the world counts such things, a rare chance for one of you. The question is— which?"

In the silence that followed, each of the girls was sure that she heard the beating of the other's heart.

"I have consulted Mr. Yorke," continued the deep voice in the darkness, "and he reports that you are, from the intellectual standpoint, equally promising. It has seemed best, therefore, since the question is so hard a one for me to decide, that"—

"Oh, father!" interrupted a girlish tone from the wood-box—a tone half choked in a fresh outburst of sobs—"there's something we ought to tell you first of all, isn't there, Dolo?"

"Go on," spoke out of a corner the voice with the odd abruptness upon it.

"We—we—we"— sobbed the spirit of the wood-box, "we listened at the hole."

"At the hole?" repeated the deep voice, inquiringly.

"Under—under your bed," sobbed the penitent spirit; "and we heard it all, till Miss Lucas came up-stairs and sent us away."

The stillness that then ensued was the most oppressive of all. When Mr. Rexford spoke again, it was very wearily—

“Who am I to show you your fault? You know now how little right I have to judge even my own children. You have overheard only what I must have forced myself to tell the one of you who is to go out into the world, where she may by chance, bearing the disgrace of my name, meet the disgrace of my story, but nevertheless you have done a dishonorable thing—a thing that shames all noble instincts. Yet it is not for a felon to reproach you.”

“Oh, please reproach us, father! We’re so sorry, so ashamed,” moaned Del. But there came no answer through the darkness.

“Which of us is to go?” asked Dolo, suddenly. The answer was husky.

“You are to decide that question for yourselves. Let me know when you have made your choice. Good-night.”

When before in the memory of the girls had their father bidden them good-night? They returned the benison timidly and groped their way up the rough ladder to their room, where far into the wee sma’ hours four sleepless eyes, two of them wet and two of them hot and throbbing, stared at the silver play of moonlight on the wall.

CHAPTER X.

DEL.

But we that live in fairyland
Nae sickness know nor pain ;
I quit my body when I will,
And take to it again.

I quit my body when I please,
Or unto it repair ;
We can inhabit at our ease
In either earth or air.

— OLD BALLAD.

SIX great tides had flowed and ebbed since that
wakeful night when the girls lay watching
the moon-light on the wall, and still they looked
at each other, whenever their glances met, with
puzzled, questioning eyes. But as the fourth
morning, brimmed with sunshine, shone against
Del's drowsy eyelids, the blue eyes flew open with
a beam of resolution in them visible through all
the mists of dreamland. Dressing softly so as
not to disturb Dolo, who was sleeping with the
sheet drawn up over her face, so that nothing of

her could be seen but one small brown ear and a long black braid tossed over the pillow, Del knelt before the window to lift the morning prayer she had learned at her mother's knee. The sky was brightest azure, with no flake or feather of cloudlet to be seen. "There's not the least mite of anything to stop my prayer," thought Del, gazing up contentedly into the clear blue arch; "if I could see it going up, I suppose it would look like a bird—a white bird, maybe. I wonder if the angels will hear it singing as it flies and say to each other—'Whose little human prayer is this, coming up to God so early in the morning?' And perhaps mamma will hear it, too, and know it's mine. I hope so." Then turning from heaven to earth, Del discovered with delight that it was one of those rarely transparent mornings when the coast was so distinctly outlined that even color effects could be discerned upon it—as the light-green banks sloping down to the water's edge and relieved here and there by darker clumps of pine-trees.

"Perhaps by and by I shall be walking on that very grass, under those very trees," thought Del, and her eyes glistened and smiled.

Yet early as it was when Del ran down the ladder, her father had already breakfasted and gone. Indeed the children had scarcely seen Mr.

Rexford for the past three days. Deepest gloom had again invaded that moody spirit. The knowledge that his daughters had heard the story of his shame revived all the old misery and bitterness. He would not eat with them nor talk with them nor meet their shy appealing looks when he accidentally came upon them about the house. He denied himself to Nat, he forsook his study, a mood of restlessness possessed him and he haunted the western end of the island until the Hermit, whom he encountered on the morning of the third day, beckoned with his withered hand and asked him softly, in trembling accents —

“Are you a fallen spirit or only a lost soul?”

After this Mr. Rexford hunted out a sequestered nook under the bluff and lay stretched there, with hands clasped beneath his head and haggard eyes staring seaward, for hours at a time.

“Mayn’t I have my breakfast without waiting for Dolo?” asked Del, of Miss Lucas.

“If you’ll wait on yourself,” answered the housekeeper, who was ironing at a board balanced over the backs of two chairs. Del readily assented and flew about like an excited chicken, preparing her simple morning meal, which she dispatched with the ardor born of a healthful appetite, and then ran out into the sunshine.

The familiar boom of the tide gladdened her

young heart and she tripped down over the bluff to bid the sea good-morning. There it rolled, blue and broad and dear as ever, the brave old sea, and Del danced in it and splashed the water with her hands and even stooped and tasted the salt waves with her fresh red lips, so warmly did she love it. And all the while she was talking to her friend, in a singing tone that chimed in sweetly enough with the music of the surf.

“I’ll tell you a secret, dear sea,” she sung; “but you mustn’t tell it, not even to the gulls, for they might fly up and tell the clouds, and the clouds might tell the rainbow, and the rainbow might be so astonished that it would tip right upside down and upset all its pot of gold. Then there would be a golden rain all over the earth and I would hold out my apron and catch enough to get Nick a new throat and Rob an elegant straw hat and myself a thousand new dresses. Maybe I could just cut those out of the rainbow, though. Wouldn’t that be lovely? I should like to dress just in rainbows and sunsets and sunrises. I wish, dear sea, if you love me, you would rise up high some night and drown all the gray flannel there is in all the world, so that I need never have another ugly gray flannel frock. Aren’t they just hideous? Don’t you hate to see me wear them? You wear gray sometimes, yourself,

but it's a soft, beautiful mist-gray, and it always fits. My frocks never fit. Oh, but the secret! I almost forgot the secret. Well, it's this. One of these days, dear sea, you are to take a little boat in your arms, very carefully, please, and swing it over, all across the crests of the waves, to the mainland, and then set it down softly and kiss it good-by, for either Dolo or I will be in it. You want to know which, don't you? So does everybody, but it is just the hardest question that ever was to decide. Before I go home to dinner this noon, though, I shall have made up my mind to something. When I've found out what, I'll tell you. For you remember you've promised not to whisper it even to the gulls."

At this point in the conversation, for the sea was ably sustaining his part in the musical dialogue, Del caught sight of Eric running along the top of the bluff, with little Nick, still weak from his night of suffering, lagging far in the rear.

"Eric! Oh, Eric!" called Del, curving her hands on either side of her mouth. "Eric! Oh, Eric!"

"Ship ahoy!" rang back through the crisp morning air, and the runner, waving his cap, paused on the edge of the bluff.

"Come down."

"Can't."

“Why not?”

“Better fun up here.”

“Oh, do you want me?”

“No.”

“You mean boy! I wouldn’t come for anything. There!”

“You wait an hour or two. Then see what you see.”

“Where?”

“In the sky.”

“Oh, Eric, tell me.”

“No. Girls are only in the way when business is on hand. Just you watch the sky.”

And evidently fearing lest his resolution should fail, Eric took to his heels again and scampered out of sight, faithfully attended by his small satellite.

Del looked after him with a blending of reproachful indignation and lively curiosity.

“What is he going to do? The horrid boy! I know he’s up to some mischief. If he gets poor little Nick into a scrape, his mother will make him sorry. Why didn’t he tell me? It must be something pretty bad. He said I was to look at the sky. The sky? Oh, pshaw! He’s going to fly a silly kite. It will serve him right if he loses it out at sea. Any way, I needn’t begin to watch for an hour yet.”

Under ordinary circumstances, however, Del would have given her playmate chase, but she remembered how grave a problem she had to settle that morning and fell to work on it in good earnest.

"This is the way of it if I go," she said, musingly. "I'll have a lovely time on the dear old island all the rest of the summer and every one will love me very much, because I am going away so soon. Then in September that funny man who makes bows will come again, with a trunk—maybe two or three—all packed with nice, pretty dresses, and soft, bright-colored shawls such as mamma used to have, and hats with long, drooping feathers, and oh! all sorts of splendiferous things. And I shall tell everybody good-by, and they'll all cry very hard, and I shall be so sorry for them. Then Cap'n Noll and Eric will take the best dory and row us over to the coast, and there we'll get into the cars and ride ever so far away, clean out of sight of the sea. Oh, I shouldn't like that. But then it would be for only a little while. And when the brakeman called, "Colorado, Col-o-ra-do!"—for I remember how they used to call out the stations when I was a little girl and went to New York with mamma—we would get out. Let me see, though. Is Colorado a city or a state? Uncle Maurice doesn't mind if I do forget such little things as

that. Anyhow, I should drive up to the boarding-school in a carriage, with my prettiest clothes on, and the principal would come running to the door and bow this way and smile this way"—here Del astonished a venerable crab by bestowing upon him a sweeping courtesy and a suave grimace—"and would say, 'Come right into the parlor, my dear; we are waiting supper for you'. And I should be so pleasant at supper that all the girls and teachers would love me straight away, and I should be at the head of all my classes, and probably I should learn to write poems and paint pictures and play on the organ and the violin, and I should read all the good books in the world and grow up into a very wise and beautiful young lady, with the right ways of walking and talking and behaving, as mamma had. Then a great many young gentlemen would come and ask me to marry them, and I should tell all but one that they might be my brothers, but I should fall in love with the handsomest and cleverest and best—oh! and the richest of them all, and marry him and come back with him to Hermit Island, where we would build a magnificent great house. And poor father would be so proud of me he would forget all his troubles, and Dolo would marry Nat, and Rob and Eric and all the rest would be just as they are now—only my husband would be a

doctor, so he could cure Nick's throat. And my distinguished friends—authors, actors and clergymen—would come over in boats to see me very often, and I would go over to the coast in a sail-boat of my own whenever I chose, without asking leave of anybody. And not a shred of gray flannel should ever be seen on Hermit Island. Yes, all that would be nice. But that's if I go, and not Dolo. Now I must think it out the other way."

But just here Del spied Uncle Maurice strolling along the beach, with Nathan by his side. Nathan was carrying a large umbrella under his arm and a back-rest over his shoulder. He held a bottle of ink, a pen and blotter in one hand, and with the other based a pile of books under his chin. Uncle Maurice carried a thin writing-tablet and a few blank leaves of paper.

As they neared Del, Uncle Maurice nodded smilingly and called, "You see I am utilizing my holiday."

"Oh, Uncle Maurice, are you going to write something?" asked Del, bounding toward him.

"If the impulse comes," replied Uncle Maurice, glancing at Nat, who set his lips firmly together, but held his gray eyes downcast; "I would not profane the realm of truth by thrusting myself into it uninvited. If I am summoned, it is quite

a different matter. But Wisdom beckons whom she will. She is not to be captured by force."

"Will it be an article for a magazine?" asked Del, capering with excitement, like the little wild creature she was.

"The editor of *The Eagle Review* has just written and asked me for it," admitted Uncle Maurice, not without a gleam of pleasure in the dreamy eyes.

"It's a first-rate chance," said Nat, eagerly—almost pleadingly.

"One has always a chance to witness to the truth," returned his father, with a touch of rebuke upon his quiet tone; "what matter whether by speech or silence? What matter whether to audience of men or angels?"

Nat colored and busied himself in preparing a little study out on the beach. He adjusted the back-rest in the sand, stood up the umbrella, which had a preternaturally long handle, over it, strewed the books of reference about within easy reach and placed the writing materials close at hand.

"There, sir!" he said, "there's a jolly little tent for you."

Then the lad hesitated, shoved his big brown hands down into the depths of his pockets, awkwardly dragged one bare foot back and forth in

the sand, and finally added, with a sudden child-like abandon quite out of Nat's usual way—

“Please—please write this morning, papa.”

“Would you, too, bow yourself in the dark house of Mammon, my boy?” asked the idealist, with an accent of sorrowful surprise, and then went on, in low, murmurous voice, quoting a stanza of the old English poet with whom his nature was so much in sympathy—

“Both roofe, and floore, and wals, were all of gold,
But overgrowne with dust and old decay,
And hid in darknesse, that none could behold
The hew thereof; for vew of cheareful day
Did never in that house it selfe display,
But a faint shadow of uncertain light;
Such as a lamp, whose life does fade away;
Or as the moone, cloathed with cloudy night,
Does shew to him, that walkes in feare and sad affright.”

“Oh, it's not—not—not that,” protested Nat, stammering worse than ever in his distress, “though God knows we need a little money bad enough just now. But no, sir; it's not that. It's—it's—it's something quite different. But please write the article, papa. *The Eagle Review* will publish it, as it did that last one, almost three years ago, and the editor will send you letters from celebrated men about it. Only the letters make me angry, too, for you could be more celebrated than any of them, if you would.”

"Well, well, my boy," said his father, sitting down in the sand under the umbrella and leaning against the back-rest; "you are a good son, and so are the others, and I will try hard to please you all and your mother. But I feel—I feel as if the day were to bring me a message of silence."

"Confound the day!" growled Nat, when he had tipped the umbrella at a still more shady angle over his father's head and had withdrawn with Del out of earshot; "if it does anything of the kind, I'll—I'll stone the sun out of it. I will."

"Why-ee, Nathan Yorke!" exclaimed Del, "what a thing to say! You'll not find a pebble large enough for that on Hypotenuse Beach."

"I notice that the sun doesn't look much scared," admitted Nat, half sulkily, half humorously; "but if father doesn't do something pretty soon to prove to chattering idiots like that Grafton and to the world at large what genius there is in him, I shall go drown myself."

"Why, Nat, *we* all know," said Del, consolingly.

"I want everybody to know," replied Nat, with vehemence. "He'll never have a better chance than this. Oh, if only he'll write that article!"

And Nat flung himself down at full length in the white sand, with his sharp chin resting between the palms of his two hands and his eyes

intently fixed upon the little literary encampment under the umbrella.

"Are you going to keep watch?" asked Del, laughing. "Good-by, then. I hope he'll write it, Nat."

"So do I," answered Nat, in a choked voice. "Good-by."

And Del left the boy lying on guard, with his eyes so keen and eager that it seemed as if they would pierce holes through the umbrella-top.

It was with some difficulty that Del, after this interruption, brought her thoughts back to the subject in hand. She struck out over the bluff across the island, and was resting on the northern shore, curled up in a little gray flannel bunch, her bare brown feet in her bare brown hands and her winsome, girlish face turned out to sea, before she fairly resumed her meditations.

"Now I must imagine it all through on the other side," she said to herself. "Supposing I should go to Dolo and say, 'Dear sister'—only it would seem so funny to say that to Dolo—'I want you to go to Colorado and have the education you would like so much, and I will stay with father'. Then everybody on the island would say how noble and generous I was, and I should feel something singing in my heart the whole time. Uncle Maurice would let me read all his books,

and Cap'n Noll would give me his prettiest shells and ivories, and the boys would all quarrel to walk with me, and perhaps even father would love me for being so self-denying. Then I should live here years and years and years and be like Tennyson's St. Agnes, for I shouldn't wear gray flannel frocks any more, but always long white robes, and my hair would float loose on my shoulders, and I should lean out of my window a great deal, especially snowy nights, when the moon was bright, and look up to heaven. And people would come from all around to the island to see me, because I should be so holy. I should make beautiful hymns and sing them very sweetly, and not live to be old. I should be thin, very thin, and white as alabaster, and I should rarely smile, but I should have a serious, uplifted expression. And the boys would always stay with me and take care of me and have a great reverence for my saintliness. And people would urge me to come to the mainland, but I should refuse, very gently but very firmly, to leave my island home, and when I died, there would be a white marble chapel built here, with angels carved on it bearing me to heaven, just as they did St. Katharine. And the boys would guard the chapel night and day, and people would come from way across the ocean to say their prayers in it, and lilies and

snowdrops would spring up all over the island. But I should be in heaven, with a crown of stars and a golden harp, and all the angels would smile on me. Now which would I rather do—this or the other? I almost think I like this best."

But peace and quiet for reflective minds were not to be secured on Hermit Island that morning. A shrill scream from above caused Del to lift her startled gaze and then leap to her feet and throw up her arms in consternation. For there, a few rods over her head, was the uncanny vision of a curious, swollen, bag-like object, with a terrified and shrieking small boy attached. It was Nick himself, and that horrible, flapping, patchwork balloon was bearing him straight out to sea.

"Oh, Nick, Nick!" screamed Del, springing up and down and wringing her hands; "hold on—hold on tight!"

"I can't let go," piped back Nick's shrill little voice. "Eric tied me."

In an incredibly short time the whole human population of the island, except the Hermit, came rushing to the shore. Mrs. Yorke was almost the first arrival, but fainted away directly, Grandma Brimblecomb trotting down the beach just in time to catch the falling form in her plump arms. Mr. Yorke, calm and resolute and more keenly practical in this emergency than his neighbors

had ever seen him, called cheerfully to the boy and pushed out with Nat in the lightest dory. Cap'n Noll sprang into his own stanch little boat, drawing Eric, who was white and dazed with mortal fright, in with him.

"Now, my lad," the kind-hearted sailor said, with bluff friendliness, forcing a pair of oars into the boy's cold hands, "see if you can be as clever in getting the little chap out of the scrape as you were in getting him in. Come, here's the chance to show your mettle."

And Eric, throwing himself upon the oars with a fury of energy, rowed as he had never rowed before. Mr. Rexford, arriving later than the others, found Robert madly baling out an old, discarded tub of a fishing-boat and dashed to his assistance. In a moment more they, too, were afloat, though sitting halfway up to their knees in water. Miss Lucas lent her aid by unceremoniously picking up Baby Merry, whose screams were louder than Nick's, and carrying her away out of sight of what all feared, though no one voiced the fear, must be an immediate catastrophe. For the clumsy balloon had been blown out over the water and was settling fast. The breeze was capricious and tossed its queer plaything back and forth in a way that confused and baffled the movements of the boats.

"Let us keep well apart," shouted Mr. Yorke to the other crews; "the chances are better so."

"If one only knew where the thing would strike!" groaned Robert.

"Keep up heart!" shouted Cap'n Noll, cheerily; "that there airy machine aint going to sink in a minute, and the youngster will have wit enough to keep himself afloat by her, till we can get to him."

But suddenly a contrary puff of wind drove the balloon quite away from the vicinity of the dories, and at the same instant a piteous outcry from Nick was smothered in an ominous splash. The line that held the little fellow to the balloon had given way and he was struggling in the water.

Eric, beside himself with terror, threw down his oars and sprang overboard, buffeting the great waves with splendid strokes; the others bent manfully to their blades: but the boats were all too far away, and little Nick could not swim.

Rescue came from an unexpected quarter. Dolo had foreseen this peril from the outset and, kneeling at the water's very edge, with both arms clasped tight about Major's neck, although the dog struggled fiercely and even growled full in her face, she had held him back until now.

She had kissed him, looked into his eyes and pleaded with him —

"Major, Major, you know you love me. Oh, please trust me a little longer. It is only to save your strength, Major. It is only so that you can help Nick better by and by. You must believe me, Major. Be still! Be still!"

And the dog had trusted the voice and the eyes he knew and had suffered himself to be restrained by the bondage of those slender arms.

But when the balloon swerved away from the boats, it came nearly opposite the point where Dolo and Major were waiting, and as the girl saw Nick fall, she set the dog free with a clear, bold cry and raced out with him through the waves, till the water was up to her shoulders.

"Now for him, Major!" she gasped. "Swim! Swim with all your might!"

The good dog needed no bidding. He plunged through the heavy waters as only a good dog can and leapt up to meet the in-rushing billow that was bearing the drenched and inert little body on its crest.

"He has him! Oh, he has him!" shrieked Del, and ran with Dolo to help the nearly exhausted dog drag his burden in through the surf.

The boats pulled in with scarcely less speed than they had pulled out. Mr. Rexford and Robert were upset in the landing and rolled over and over in the surf, but nobody minded that. The

girls were wrapt in sailor jackets, though, and started home on the run to get into dry clothing. Mrs. Yorke was revived from her fainting fit in time to see the first trace of color creep back to Nick's rigid little lips, and Cap'n Noll, who had pulled Eric on board again, busied himself in chafing that young hopeful's wrists and chest.

"He stands as good a chance of being ill as the small shaver," said the captain, gruffly.

"He? He'll never die in his bed," retorted Nat, significantly; "I wouldn't waste many worries over him to-day."

At last Mr. Yorke could look up long enough from the little body which he and Robert and Grandma Brimblecomb were all rubbing at once, to ask Eric, with an unwonted sternness in his voice—

"And now can you tell me how this came about?"

Poor Eric had need of all his manliness to restrain the tears.

"I wanted a balloon ascension, papa," he said, pathetically; "we had never had one on the island, and I thought it would surprise you all so much."

"It did," remarked Mr. Rexford, laconically.

"Let the boy alone," growled Cap'n Noll, who could not bear to see his favorite in disgrace.

"And so I got some old meal-sacks down cellar," pursued Eric, in a breaking voice, "and sewed them together and lined them with paper. Then I rigged up a little underground furnace up yonder, just the further side of the bluff, and I ran an old piece of stovepipe from it to the balloon and—and this morning I started up the fire. But I was too heavy for it myself, so I let Nick go"—

"There's a privilege for you," muttered Nat.

"But truly, papa—oh, truly, mamma," urged Eric, with the big tears coursing freely now down the cheeks that were white through all their tan, "I tied another line to him and rolled the end of that around my arm—see—so that if anything should go wrong, or if the balloon should blow out over sea, I could pull them both back. But the line broke at the first tug and after that there wasn't anything I could do. Nick knows I never meant to scare him."

And Eric flung himself in a passion of penitence down upon the sand beside the martyr of his youthful science, who smiled feebly and stroked his brother's tear-stained face with a weary little hand.

The group broke up soon after this. Nick was tenderly carried home and put to bed between hot blankets. The other dripping members of the

party withdrew to find more comfortable attire. Mr. Yorke sent Nat and Robert over to the coast to fetch a physician, for he entertained the gravest fears as to the effects of this excitement and exposure upon the child's fragile health. Major was given an unusually large and delicious bone for dinner, and over their bowls of bread and milk Del said to her sister—

“Dolo, I think you must have what Uncle Maurice calls the faculty of prompt decision. Now I haven’t. I’ve tried all the morning to decide whether I wanted most to go to Colorado or to stay here, and I can’t tell. So I’ve just made up my mind to this much—to leave it all to you, and whichever you choose to do, I’ll be contented and happy to do the other thing. Honor bright, I will. Only I’m in a hurry to know—so please decide it this very afternoon.”

CHAPTER XI.

DOLO.

He knows not the path of duty
Who says that the way is sweet;
But he who is blind to the beauty,
And finds but thorns for his feet.

— RICHARD WATSON GILDER.

DOLO listened to Del in silence, but there was acquiescence in the very way she held her spoon. Del felt relieved of responsibility and hurried away after dinner to inquire for Nick. She found a strange quiet resting on the usually lively household, for a family which boasts four boys rarely fails to make a noise in the world. But this afternoon all was very still. Robert and Nathan were away on their quest for a physician and could hardly be expected home before night-fall. Eric, awed and miserable, lay stretched at full length on the hard floor in front of the cold fireplace, his face buried on Major's shaggy neck, and Mr. Yorke, with a new manliness and energy

upon him, was seated at the kitchen table, writing rapidly.

“How can you sit and write in that heartless way?” asked his wife, petulantly, coming out of the side-room where Nick, carefully tended by Grandma Brimblecomb, was tossing and moaning in a feverish sleep. “I don’t believe you care for the child at all.”

Del’s blue eyes flashed and Eric’s curly head moved restlessly upon its living pillow, but Mr. Yorke merely glanced up to smile and answer gently—

“There is nothing I can do for the precious boy just now, my dear, but this. You will be glad, one of these days, when our little man is running about again, and there comes a doctor’s bill to be settled, to find a few dollars in my purse.”

Hastening home, Del communicated the tidings of Nick’s condition to Miss Lucas and to her father. They both listened with interest, for the glow of feeling which had made the hearts of all these island neighbors beat as one in that desperate struggle of the morning, had not yet spent itself. Miss Lucas expressed a desire, not without a hesitating glance toward the master of the house, to fry an extra supply of doughnuts that afternoon and double the quantity of baked pota-

toes for supper, that there might be something to take over to the Yorkes, as Robert and Nathan would be hungry on returning from their trip; and Mr. Rexford not only assented to this unwonted proposal, but quite took Del's breath away by the suggestion that two of the boys should take their meals with them, until Nick was better. Del recognized with joyful wonder that in this sense of misfortunes other than his own her father had thrown off the dark dominion of his recent mood. His stern voice grew musical in these new tones of sympathy, and his austere face, with the light of friendliness upon it, looked to his wistful little daughter almost handsome. Mr. Rexford need not have feared that his children would scorn him for his story. The knowledge of his sin and sorrow was the one thing needed to fan their neglected young affections into flame. True to the woman nature, for blame they gave compassion and in place of contempt a yearning to console.

Anxious to speed her message, Del ran over to find Cap'n Noll, but he had resorted to his customary expedient, when the world went wrong—lighted his pipe and gone out in his dory to visit his lobster-pots. Dolo was sitting on the piazza steps of the Brimblecomb cottage, trying to appease Baby Merry, who was much puzzled as to

why she was not allowed to go and see Nick. Just as Del joined her sister, the midget came rushing to them, screaming at the top of her voice and holding a wasp tightly pressed between rosy thumb and forefinger. The wasp was stinging furiously, but his dauntless little captor, though hopping up and down with agony, would not relinquish her prize. The scientific curiosity seemed to assert itself within her, for she reiterated in a dolorous outcry, while dancing wildly about —

“Ee, ee! How does he do it? How does he do it? Ee, ee, ee!”

Even when the girls had struck the wasp from her and bound up the burning little hand in flour, Baby Merry’s thoughts seemed to run on kindred topics, for nestling against Dolo’s shoulder she remarked in a wise, conversational little way peculiar to herself —

“I like flowers. I like flowers mos’ as well as — as chairs.”

“But you can’t sit on the flowers,” said Dolo, absently.

“N-no; but bees sit on the flowers,” responded Baby Merry, and proceeded to invent a remarkable legend of bees and wasps and wild-briar roses, but while the plot was still thickening, the drooping eyelids fell and the child, worn out with the excitement of the morning, dropped asleep.

"Will you put her to bed?" asked Del.

"No; I'll lie down in the hammock with her," said Dolo, and so Del, having told what she could of Nick, left her sister swinging softly in Cap'n Noll's big seaman's hammock, which was suspended from the posts of the piazza, Baby Merry's soft little face pressed close to her brown cheek.

When Cap'n Noll came back, Baby Merry was still sleeping. After a polite inquiry or two concerning the welfare of the lobsters, Dolo confided the child to the captain's charge and strolled off to the beach, determined to make her decision before going home. With her there was no glamour of romance thrown over the situation. Her keen, cool intellect recognized distinctly the advantage of education and of the wider life beyond the narrow limits of the island. She wanted to go. There was no doubt about that. The longing for a richer and more varied experience had been growing up in her for months past. Until Mr. Grafton came to the island, however, it had been but vague and undefined desire. Since then it had intensified into a fierce hunger. But Dolo knew that if she chose to go, it would be a deliberately selfish choice, and under all her wild, freakish, sullen ways the little gypsy had a conscience. There was ever one constant spring of

pure waters feeding her purpose to do right, and that was the memory of her mother. But to-day there were various special pleaders for the cause of generosity. The warm touch of Baby Merry's face upon her cheek made her heart tender, the gravity of little Nick's condition made it earnest, and the influence of the strong passion of the morning—of those wild moments when she was clinging with both arms to Major's straining neck, made it brave.

Dolo paced the sands until sunset, with her brown brows tightly knit, her thin lips firmly set and her black eyes glowing with changing lights and shadows. It was low tide, the wet beach gleamed in the sun and clearly mirrored the queer outlandish little figure, with its cloth cap, black braid, clumsy dress and bare feet and ankles. The sand was so firm that her light steps made no foot-prints. The shore was ghastly that afternoon, however, being strewn with signs of death. Here were a flock of greedy sandpeeps, pecking at the skeleton of a skate, and there a swarm of flies settled thickly upon the bloated body of a porgy. Dolo shuddered a little as her glance fell on these and like traces of decay, and she scoured in the sand, with a look of loathing, the foot that had struck accidentally against a dead mackerel. Once she started to drive away

old Frisk, who was picking up a Friday dinner along the coast, but checked herself. After all, was not Frisk doing as the voice of nature in her breast had bidden her, even when she sprang with teeth and claws upon that poor, fluttering, wing-broken sea-gull and left of the throbbing, beautiful creature only a scattering of bloody feathers? This episode made Dolo, who was too far away to interfere, faint and sick, but she dropped the sand-dollar she had taken up with revengeful intent to fling at the cat. After all, every one for himself was the law of the universe. Why should she who had so little, be expected to stand aside for Del, who had so much? Del was born lucky, as she was born pretty. People always loved her. She would be happy anywhere. But for herself, place would make a difference, training would make a difference. It was only justice that she should go.

The skies clouded over. Showers fell at intervals, and there was a distant rumble of thunder, with crooked flashes of lightning. Still Dolo, heedless of the rain and simply shrugging that contemptuous small shoulder of hers at the far-off thunder roar, persisted in her measured walk. It was a hard problem that she was working out. The solution must satisfy not only herself, but the watchful spirit of her mother.

Just before sunset the rain ceased, the clouds rolled back and a rainbow leapt into view—a broad and beautiful ribbon of color, arched from sea to shore, one end hidden among the forest trees of the main-land and the other resting on the ocean, blending with the exquisite reflection of the bow in the water. That portion of sky and sea and far-off strip of shore framed within the iridescent arch was suffused with a wonderfully pure, soft and gracious light, as white as holiness. Dolo bowed her stubborn little head as she gazed, and when she lifted it again, her victory was won.

Then the girl went home with swift, firm steps and found her father leaning against the side of the house, watching the fading traces of the rainbow. Del was standing near. It was to Del that Dolo addressed herself—

“It’s all settled,” she said, briefly; “I shall stay on the island and you will go away to school.”

A great delight flashed up into Del’s blue eyes and the dainty rose-color flushed her cheeks.

“Oh, Dolo, are you sure?” she asked, breathlessly.

“Sure,” replied Dolo, in a steady voice, and glanced up toward her father, with a shy, wistful hope of his approbation.

But Mr. Rexford was looking at Del and upon his face was an unmistakable expression of disappointment.

Dolo turned away, feeling as if a sudden hand had smitten her on the face, and that night, while Del was smiling in her dreams, Dolo thrust her black head deep into the pillow and cried as if her heart would break.

The boys, spent with anxiety and hard rowing, arrived an hour after sundown, bringing with them a physician, a quick-stepping, nervous-lipped, bright-eyed little gentleman, who pronounced Nick in the first stages of lung fever. It bade fair to be a serious case, but the physician, although he was sympathetic and kind, watching half of the night by the child's bedside, could promise to come only every third day and then for no more than an hour at noon.

"Even so," he said, reasonably enough, "the trip will consume nothing short of seven hours, and I have other patients."

"You see," said Mrs. Yorke to her husband, reproachfully, "this is what your notions have brought upon your family. The boy will die, my own sweet boy will die, and be buried here in the sand."

And the poor mother, sobbing hysterically, threw herself across the foot of the bed.

The physician, with an impatient twitch of the lower lip, proceeded to mix for her a soothing draught, while Mr. Yorke in silence passed his hand over the hot face of the little sufferer, who was already delirious.

"Don't lose heart, madam," said the physician, as he deftly prepared the potion; "this lady here"—nodding toward Grandma Brimblecomb—"is almost as good as a doctor. I will give her every direction and caution possible and entrust a small assortment of medicines to her discretion. But mind you, she must not have two invalids on her hands."

The neighbors, meanwhile, were waiting about in the moonlight to hear the physician's report. Robert came out presently and brought it to them. His voice trembled as he spoke and Del wished he were not so tall, for otherwise she could slip her hand into his and comfort him, as she did with Eric. As Robert went back to the house, Mr. Rexford turned to Miss Lucas.

"Can you cook for three families?" he asked, abruptly.

"We'll help you," chorused Del and Dolo.

Miss Lucas' dull eyes brightened. She, too, was glad to do a neighborly kindness once more.

"If I have enough to cook," she answered, simply.

Mr. Rexford smiled grimly. "We'll see about that," he said; "it's a shiftless pocket that doesn't carry a penny for a rainy day."

Then he addressed himself, a little stiffly, but with an obvious desire to be cordial, to Cap'n Noll.

"Since your good wife appears to be installed as head nurse, Captain Brimblecomb, I hope you and your little granddaughter will accept the hospitality of my table for the present, though I warn you that you will find it a very plain and rugged hospitality."

Del glowed with pride in her father's unexpected munificence, Dolo eyed him curiously and Cap'n Noll, feeling greatly flattered, expanded his big chest and chuckled aloud with pleasure.

"Thank you hearty," he said, with a resounding slap upon his thigh; "I take this uncommon kind of you, sir. Hang me from the mast-head if I don't. As for the fare, a man who once lived on a raft for six blessed weeks, with nothing but half a dozen of mouldy sea biscuit and a few raw flying-fish to eat, aint likely to turn up his nose at shore victuals. We'll mess with you glad and cheery on one condition, sir, and that is, that you let me chip in my share o' the—o' the rough material, so to speak, lobsters an' flour an' clams an' sech."

Miss Lucas nodded in approval and Mr. Rexford laughed a little to himself. His daughters both started. It was the first time within their memories that they had heard their father laugh. But in his happier days Mr. Rexford had been a shrewd and appreciative observer of men, and it pleased him now, in his more genial mood, to look upon Cap'n Noll as he stood before him, the heartiest, bluffest figure of a jolly tar that ever sailed the seas. Wrinkled he was, but so is the jovial face of the ocean, with "innumerable laughter". His gray eyes beamed and twinkled as if they had stolen the sparkles of a million dancing waves. The very sea-wind was in his tumbled hair and whiskers. His mighty hands and arms, covered with their India ink emblazonry, looked strong to throw a life-rope to a drowning man. When he walked, his body rolled upon its sturdy legs like a rocking ship at sea. And when he spoke, his deep gruff voice had in it all suggestions of rollicking sailor-songs and child-delighting yarns and the hoarse, commanding shout that cleaves the roar of an Atlantic storm. Up to this evening Mr. Rexford had seen in the captain only an intrusive, tiresome old braggart, but beauty ever resides less in the thing beheld than in the eyes beholding. And it is equally true that the man to whom we do a favor acquires a new value

in our vain-glorious human judgment. It is our own magnanimity exerted upon him which invests him with a reflected grace. From the moment that he invited Cap'n Noll to his table, Mr. Rexford began to like him.

"You may bring anything you like, so long as you bring an appetite," Mr. Rexford answered; "I shall ask Mr. Yorke and his sons to take their meals with us, too. I suppose your wife will in the main look after herself and Mrs. Yorke and the sick boy, though we shall be glad to send in whatever may be needed."

"Trust the little woman for that," said the captain, cheerily; "there's not much comes up in life as she ain't a match fur. But I'm afeard you're rather short o' hands to undertake sech heavy sailin', sir. I can carry wood an' water myself an' do chores about, an' I calc'late to fetch the doctor, for the boys must mind the critters an' keep etarnal busy on that plagued bit o' farm, else we'll all fall short o' kitchen sass. But you'll find five men-folks, an' a baby thrown in, a consider'ble heavy haul on your net, sir. An' think o' the dishes. I'm not much used to women tackle, but maybe I could bear a hand with a towel odd times."

"I have two daughters," said Mr. Rexford, looking somewhat dubiously at the two gray-

frocked little figures that were outlined so clearly against the moonlight.

"Oh, yes; we'll do the dishes," promised Del, readily. "Which would you rather, Dolo—wash or wipe?"

"I've made all the decisions I'm going to this day," replied Dolo, in her old, sullen fashion.

And so life on the island formed itself, for the next three weeks, around that little sick-bed as the center. Miss Lucas cooked right valiantly, though marveling much in her secret soul at the insatiate and unappeasable character of the boy appetite; Del and Dolo washed and wiped huge piles of dishes with more patience than could have been expected of girls so little trained to the monotony of household tasks, although Del occasionally seasoned the suds with tears, and once Dolo, selecting as the dishes she hated most a narrow-necked milk pitcher and stolid little sugar bowl, struck them together with avenging fury and smashed them both into flinders; Cap'n Noll dug clams, fished, tended his beloved lobster-pots and rowed the physician back and forth, putting up a sail, however, when the wind was fair; Eric picked up driftwood, ran errands, fetched pail after pail of water and looked after the cattle; Robert and Nathan worked steadily on the reluctant little farm, where not even a pumpkin vine

would thrive without personal and repeated solicitation ; Grandma Brimblecomb watched with the fever-racked boy by day, and Mr. Yorke by night, the poor mother being too nearly frenzied with distress to render any effectual aid, and more than one bulky package of manuscript crossed the bay in Cap'n Noll's fish-perfumed pocket to be mailed in the post-office on the coast.

There seemed nothing left for Mr. Rexford to do but to amuse Baby Merry, and to that by no means easy task he gradually bent his stately energies. Cap'n Noll whistled and swore strange sailor-oaths under his breath, the boys stared and nudged each other's elbows, and the girls could hardly credit the evidence of their senses ; but in the course of a fortnight the brown-eyed little rogue, by her baby fearlessness and innocent, nestling trust, had subjugated the stern-browed mathematician and made him, if not the slave of her queenship, at least her attentive and punctilious prime minister.

Meanwhile Nick's fever ran high, until there came a night of gravest anxiety. Mr. Yorke sat sadly by the shaded lamp, his forehead resting on his hand. The long hours of watching had left him wan of face, but they had given a more alert glance to the usually dreamy eyes and firmer lines to the naturally irresolute mouth. His wife,

wrapt in a shawl, was crouched on a low stool opposite him, her arms clasped about her knees and her thin form rocking piteously back and forth. The child reclined against the pillows, gasping out loud, painful breaths. Presently the physician, closely coated and scarf'd, hurried in. Cap'n Noll had gone for him late in the afternoon.

"If he comes in my dory of hisself, then he comes in my dory of hisself," the tough old skipper had growled, "but in my dory he comes, if I have to collar him and tie him down with fish-lines."

Resort to these extreme measures had not proved necessary, however, for the tired physician, no whit lacking in the characteristic heroism of his profession, had made nothing, when he realized how urgent was the call, of undertaking the rough voyage over the dark waters.

He tiptoed across the room, scrutinized his little patient sharply, listened to the laboring breath, stooped and peered into the swollen throat, touched the hot wrist and temples and shook his head.

"The boy has a place to breathe through no larger than a knitting-needle," he murmured to Mr. Yorke, as he set his tall hat upon the pillow and stepped back from the bed.

They all supposed the child unconscious of

what was going on about him, far adrift on a sea of feverish pain; but Nick had one cable yet holding him to this mortal shore. It was his mother's face. The boy adored his mother, and every now and then, all through that suffering night, the shadowy lids, unnoticed by the watchers, had fluttered open, and the hollow, hungry eyes had sought that face, haggard, tear-stained, faded, but beautiful to him.

Now when next Nick tried to look, he found the physician's tall, black, ugly hat standing on the pillow between his eyes and the star of his childish love. That tall hat did what the medicine had failed to do. It arrested the ebbing forces of the will. The boy felt a sense of resentment flash through his darkening mind, new life came with a new determination and by a supreme effort he stirred his little wasted arm and sent the obnoxious hat flying out upon the floor.

“Mamma!” he gasped.

They were all about him in an instant.

“Ah!” said the doctor, “he has more strength than I supposed. If we can pull him through the next few hours, we may save him yet. I would advise you, madam, if you can control yourself, to sit here beside the bed. You seem to be the cordial that he most needs.”

Control herself! The mother would have frozen

into a statue for the sake of staying the outflow of that precious rivulet of life. Grandma Brimblecomb, heedless of the fact that her fluted nightcap was all awry, soon joined the whispering group, and everything that skill and love could devise was done to shield and foster the flickering flame of being, until the death-wind which hovered so near that its breath more than once blanched the bending faces, had passed over, and the boy was saved.

The opening in the throat was a trifle enlarged by morning, the tide of the fever was turned, Nick had smiled feebly into his mother's eyes and fallen, although still breathing with difficulty, into a brief slumber.

"He will live," pronounced the physician, well-pleased with his night's work. "He will need the wisest and most devoted nursing, and the mending may be slow, for the constitution is not a vigorous one—but he will live."

Then, and not till then, a great, choking sob was heard beneath the window, and Mr. Yorke, stepping out into the chilly air of dawn, found Eric lying at full length in his mother's choicest flower-bed, his clothing saturated with the night-dews and his tearful face buried in his cap.

For a few days to come there were two sick boys in that family, but Eric paid no heavier pen-

alty for his long night vigil than a warning touch of pneumonia, and his second deed of rashness won him forgiveness for his first.

Then the islanders, cheered every morning by good tidings of Nick's convalescence, had leisure for other than sick-room thoughts, and the report that Del was going away to school in September became noised abroad. The general outburst of lamentation made Dolo's strange little face colder than ever, and a creeping root of bitterness in her heart slowly infused its poison into all her thoughts.

Eric posed as chief mourner, sometimes taking this crowning loss as a judgment upon him for his sins, but more frequently charging it to the crooked ways of fate. He tried to lose his appetite, but without remarkable success, as he made amends to himself, whenever he failed to pass his plate a third time at dinner, by rioting in Grandma Brimblecomb's gingersnaps all the afternoon. One day he climbed up into the hay-mow and tried to write a poem, but had proceeded only so far as the two words Del and shell, inscribed with a lead-pencil, one beneath the other, on a stray shingle, when Robert called to him to come and milk the cows. While the poet was engaged in this bucolic duty, Nat invaded the hay-mow, hunting for hen's eggs, and found the shingle instead.

With brotherly kindness Nat filled out the lines, so that the completed poem read—

“I would sing to Del,
If I were a shell,
Sad songs of the sea, but blow it!
I’m a gander who,
For all his ado,
Can’t balloon himself off as a poet.”

The shingle, with Eric’s compliments, was then presented to Del by Nat. This piece of unrighteous tampering with the most sacred feelings of the human heart nearly led to a pitched fight between the two boys, for Eric, in addition to all the rest, had become abnormally sensitive on the subject of balloons.

But Del’s tearful persuasions, and possibly also the fact that Nat was several inches taller than himself and unusually sinewy, induced Eric, when his wrath had cooled, to lay by the plan of thrashing his elder brother until a more convenient season.

Next to Eric, Cap’n Noll was loudest in expression of his grief. Every morning the weather-stained old mariner would come rolling up to the door of the Rexford cottage—for life on the island, as Nick grew better, gradually resumed its wonted features—with one farewell gift or

another for his Lady Blue-eyes. Once it was a collection of rainbow-tinted shells, the fruit of many voyages; once a brace of bright-winged birds from foreign isles, perched on brackets of aromatic wood. Sometimes he* brought corals, arrows, vases, ostrich eggs from South Africa, and shoes that had tormented the genteel feet of some by-gone Chinese belle, books in outlandish tongues, ornaments in shell-work, whale-teeth curiously carven, devil-fish and flying-fish, models of strange canoes and queer, squat, grass-thatched huts, and even grim calabashes, marked with cabalistic characters, that the donor claimed had graced the board at *bona fide* cannibal repasts.

But Cap'n Noll and Eric were not alone in their sorrow. Grandma Brimblecomb put her apron to her eyes whenever Del came in sight, Miss Lucas, to the child's grateful astonishment, prepared little dainties for her and set them quietly at her plate, Robert looked sober and regretful, Uncle Maurice often drew the girlish figure to his side and stroked the sunshiny hair with a gentle touch, and her father followed her every motion with deep and brooding eyes and softened his voice whenever he spoke her name. Dolo, unpraised, unpetted, unregarded, watched it all in scornful silence, while from day to day her anger gathered strength.

CHAPTER XII.

POWERS OF DARKNESS.

The morn awakes like brooding dove,
With outspread wings of gray;
Her feathery clouds close in above,
And roof a sober day.

—GEORGE MACDONALD.

IT is not necessary," said Mr. Rexford, slowly, as he pushed back his chair from the breakfast table and bent his gaze thoughtfully on Del; "it really is not necessary that you depend upon a stranger for your outfit. I am a poor man, but I am not a pauper. I would suggest, Miss Lucas, that you take Delia over to the mainland and buy her what she needs."

"Oh, father!" cried Del, with shining eyes, "may we go to-day?"

"Can't you wait till to-morrow?" asked her father, smiling. Mr. Rexford had been learning to smile during the past weeks. "The boys make their regular trip to-morrow, you know. And you

must have a little time to plan out with Miss Lucas what you need."

"Not any more gray flannel frocks," said Del, impulsively.

Miss Lucas surveyed the speaker with an expression of mild reproach.

"Gray flannel is very durable," she said.

"Oh, horribly durable!" assented Del, with emphasis, and then, fearing that she had hurt the housekeeper's feelings, she added hastily, "Of course it's nice here on Hermit Island, but I don't believe girls wear gray flannel much in Colorado."

"You can leave yours for Dolo, then," said Miss Lucas, with a gleam of economy in her colorless eyes.

Dolo shrugged her left shoulder, but no one was paying attention to Dolo, and the gesture passed unheeded.

"I think," said Mr. Rexford, musingly, "you would better call in the counsel, too, of Mrs. Yorke and that excellent woman, Mrs. Brimblecomb. There will be too much sewing for Miss Lucas to manage alone, now that the time is growing short, and they may be able to recommend a dressmaker. Perhaps they can make helpful suggestions, also, in regard to bonnets and sacques and—and polonaises—and frills—and—and"—

Mr. Rexford broke down in hopeless masculine confusion.

"Oh, father, you're so good!" exclaimed Del, timidly, but eagerly. "And now, Miss Lucas, let me help you with the housework, so we can go right over to talk with Grandma and Aunt Marion. Do you want to do dishes with me this morning, Dolo?"

"No, I don't," said Dolo, and started for the door. But Mr. Rexford called her back, with a stern rebuke for being so disobliging, and commanded her to help her sister. Dolo glowered darkly at her father, but returned, and got what wicked satisfaction she could by washing the dishes with such exasperating slowness that poor Del's patience was nearly exhausted before the last mug was wiped and set on the shelf. Then Del flew up-stairs to put the chambers in order, too wise this time to ask for aid, and Dolo, with a grimace in the direction of the sink, escaped into the outer air.

It was a strange morning. A haze hung low in the sky, giving a weird, far-away, dream-like aspect to sea and shore. The tossing foam was creamy in the shadow, and a mysterious, pallid, beautiful white in the occasional glimpses of sun. In the main the water was a wrinkled plain of shifting tints, all dull, save in the breaking of the

wave, when a vivid umber flashed into momentary view.

Dolo felt the evil spirit waxing strong within her, but all day long the child was dumbly reaching out for help to overcome it. She started first of all to find Uncle Maurice, hoping that he would give her some reading to do and perhaps talk with her a while, but she had not set many prints of her little bare feet in the wet sand before she discovered the well-known, stooping figure seated under the umbrella canopy—which seemed superfluous on such a hazy day, but witnessed none the less to Nat's devotion—and writing busily upon the tablet which rested on his knee. Dolo surveyed the good genius of the island wistfully, but was too generous to interrupt him. She was afraid of her own society, however, and ran up to the Brimblecomb cottage for a romp with Baby Merry.

But as hard fortune would have it, Baby Merry was in one of her naughtiest moods. The worst of these mischief-fits was the impossibility of punishing the culprit. Grandma Brimblecomb had never succeeded, with all her ingenuity, in devising a punishment which the perverse little creature would recognize as such, for striking was out of the question. The captain would never suffer his wife even to snap the rosy fingers. But if Baby Merry was rebuked, she laughed and mim-

icked the grave tones. If she was put in the corner, she carried on a bewitching game of boopeep over first one shoulder and then the other, and so fell in love with the corner that she refused to leave it when the appointed minutes of disgrace had flown. If she were kept indoors for a day, she declared with unruffled amiability that she would so much rather play in her "dear gramp's pretty house than out there in the horrid sand". If she were given a meal of bread and water, she partook of her prison fare with peculiar relish and gratitude. If her grandparents, at the end of their puzzled wits, refused the good-night kiss, she embraced Mr. Monk and Major instead and trotted off to her crib as radiant as ever. Once as a desperate measure she was put to bed in the middle of the afternoon, whereupon she murmured drowsily, with a cherubic smile—

"Well, I was sleepy, grandma, 'deed I was," and cuddling cozily under the clothes, fell directly into a sweet slumber, from which she aroused late in the evening, brimming over with roguery and laughter, to cut up enchanting capers all over the house until long after midnight.

"And who was punished that time, I should like to know?" grumbled the heavy-eyed captain to his wife the next morning.

This particular day Baby Merry had begun her

pranks at the breakfast-table, carrying her peccadilloes so far that she had been refused maple syrup, usually an especial delight, on her griddle cakes.

"I don't like the taste o' that old syrup, anyhow," remarked the wee philosopher, when this doom was solemnly announced to her; "I was goin' to ask you to le' me have butter instead, grandma."

The captain had pushed away his own plate, for he could never relish anything which was denied to his darling, and had hurried off on a fishing expedition, feeling that a domestic storm was in the air. And a sage weather prophet he was, for so rapidly did things go from bad to worse that Cap'n Noll's burly figure was scarcely out of sight before Grandma Brimblecomb had to threaten Baby Merry with the closet.

"I've been wantin' ever 'n' ever 'n' ever so long to play in the closet," promptly responded this epitome of cheerfulness; "an' so has Mr. Monk."

"Mr. Monk will stay down in the kitchen with me," replied Grandma Brimblecomb, decidedly, and pursing up her mouth with a determined air, she seized a broom and trudged up-stairs to a small chamber under the eaves that served, on occasions like the present, for a place of durance vile.

The room was almost bare, but Grandma Brimblecomb, still wearing an aspect of severe resolution, removed the few miscellaneous household effects that had strayed into it, whisked her broom about in search of cobwebs and even took down the shades from the windows.

“There!” she exclaimed, pantingly, leaning on her broom and gazing in triumph about the empty apartment; “I’ve done it at last. The child can’t find a single blessed thing to do but sit down on the floor and think how naughty she has been. There’s not even a bit of string or a straw left here to amuse her.”

And so Baby Merry, her sandy little pocket rifled and turned inside out, a pebble extricated from one tiny fist and a kicking grasshopper from the other, was impressively conducted across the threshold into this closet of repentance and there left alone to chew the cud of bitter reflections.

But not even solitary confinement, which has broken the spirit of many a hardened criminal, could blight the irrepressible jollity of naughty Baby Merry. When Dolo arrived on the scene, she found the chubby old lady on her knees before the door, peeping with a most disgusted expression of countenance in through the key-hole.

“Look there!” she whispered, without turning

her head, for Dolo's light step upon the stairs, steadier than Del's tripping footfall, she recognized at once. "It's no earthly use trying to hold to any discipline with that child. I declare to goodness, she's enough to make a barnacle let go."

Dolo, grasping the situation in a twinkling, stooped and applied her eye to the key-hole. There was Baby Merry dancing with frolic feet about the closet of repentance, eagerly engaged in blowing a small feather after a small fly, these two treasures and these only—but enough is as good as a feast—having escaped the broom. The fly was lazily winging his way back and forth in mid-air, and Baby, her brown eyes all a-sparkle with the excitement of the chase and her flushed cheeks puffed out so that she looked like a miniature Boreas, was keeping the feather afloat and driving it after the fly.

"She's having the best time she ever had in her life," said Grandma Brimblecomb, despairingly; "I may as well let her out."

"I'll take her off to walk with me," proposed Dolo. But there was small comfort to be had out of Baby Merry on that promenade. She would not let Dolo take her hand, she would not tell a story nor listen to one, she flew like a little demon on every whelk and snail she saw, determined to

pound them to pieces and resisting passionately when Dolo dragged her away. She punched and poked the defenseless jelly-fish with a lobster-claw she had picked up on the sand, she kicked the dead cunners entangled in the seaweed, she hooted derisively at the great waves, she spattered Dolo with salt water and finally ran away to see Nick.

During all the walk Dolo, feeling dull of heart, had put forth no effort to assert her wonted control over the child, merely interfering, from time to time, to prevent the small fury from maltreating the helpless sea-creatures. But when she noticed what direction the scampering fugitive had taken, Dolo hastened after her. Baby Merry, however, having a good start and plying her sturdy little legs at full speed, arrived first and was admitted by Mrs. Yorke, on condition of being extremely good and quiet, to Nick's sick-room. Baby had not seen her playmate since he fell ill and she was so astonished at the thin, white face upon the pillow and the shadowy hand stretched out to stroke her plump, brown cheek, that she was petrified into a wee image of propriety. But by the time poor Dolo—hoping now that some touch of peace might be instilled into her stormy mood from Nick's gentle presence, for he was such a gracious little invalid that his brothers

had dubbed him St. Nicholas — followed Baby Merry into the room, even the boy had become possessed by the spirit of evil which seemed to have chosen that day for stalking all abroad.

In short, Dolo detected Nick in a deed of blackest treachery.

“Baby,” he was pleading, as Dolo entered, “when mamma comes back, say you want a cooky for each of us — for each of us; now, mind, will you?”

For the fever-famished child was hungry enough to eat his bedposts, and the delicate strips of toast and sparing cupfuls of broth on which he was regaled at prudent intervals only served to insult his craving.

Let us hope it was the ravening hunger in him that was responsible for his most unchivalrous conduct. For as Mrs. Yorke came in, bearing an unwelcome dose for Nick, Baby Merry gazed up guilelessly into her face and said as bidden —

“Please give me an’ Nick a cooky.”

“Why-ee, Baby Merry!” sighed Nick, from the bed in a grieved, superior tone; “how rude you have grown since I’ve been sick! That was very naughty. I’m quite ’stressed about you.”

Baby Merry, not unnaturally, looked puzzled and put up a pouting lip, while Mrs. Yorke, all unaware of the under current, but anxious lest

her boy's slight strength should be overtaxed, led the child from the room. Dolo followed, but left Baby Merry curled up in a corner of the fireplace, serenely devouring a cooky, for Nick's monkey-device, though it failed utterly as regarded himself, worked well for the little cat's paw. But despairing of any heavenly effects to be wrought upon her dark temper from the influence of innocent childhood—at least, of such specimens of innocent childhood as Hermit Island could produce that morning—Dolo, unaccompanied, wandered aimlessly about the shore until dinner time.

Robert dropped in to dine with them, for much more neighborly habits, as regarded the Rexford cottage, had prevailed in the island since the day of the balloon ascension. The big fellow was good-natured as ever and readily agreed to take Miss Lucas and Del across to the coast the next day.

"I wish there was room for you, too," Robert said, in his thoughtful, kindly fashion, turning to Dolo; "but we have to bring back so much in the way of groceries, I'm afraid to take the risk of overloading the boat."

"And this time you'll have dry goods to bring back, too," said Del, blithely.

Robert laughed.

"Dry goods or wet goods — we'll wait till they are landed before we decide," he said.

Then the talk turned on Del's outfit and passed to Colorado and the journey thither and the traditional features of boarding-school life, until Dolo, utterly miserable with envy, yet still so true to her nobler nature as to be ashamed of her misery, wished she could crawl into some deep and dark secluded hole and pull the hole in, too.

She quitted the table while the others were still talking and stole softly out of doors. As she stood poised on the edge of the bluff, undecided where to go or what to do, she noticed that the morning haze had lifted, but that there was still a curious unreality upon the face of things — a concealed threat in nature, a hinted foreboding in the air. The water was silver gray, with glints of green. Only the distant shore-line was blue. The sky wore a veil of thin, gray clouds, but these were rifted at the zenith, disclosing faint, far-away tints of violet. There were white caps out at sea and the water looked cold. The wind was so chill that the little wild mustard blossoms seemed to shrink and shiver.

Dolo wondered idly if this keen air would make the Hermit cough. He had been coughing so badly of late. Indeed, a fortnight since she had been so much disturbed about his condition

that she had ventured, with Uncle Maurice's approval, to take the physician to see him; but the interview had not been a success. The Hermit had eyed the affable docter distrustfully and announced to Dolo in a confidential whisper that he was an impostor. "I can prove it, too," the old man had said, raising his white head fiercely and pointing one tremulous finger at the physician as that gentleman stood before him in all the dignity of his tall silk hat. "Tell me, if you are a doctor, did any man ever own a heart that never thought an evil thought and never loved a lie?"

"The scalpel does not probe so deep as to lay bare the thoughts of the heart," said the physician, drily; "but from my experience in the world, I should say no."

"I told you he was an impostor," affirmed the Hermit, turning to Dolo, and he uncovered the plateful of dinner which Grandma Brimblecomb had just sent over to him. Upon one side of the plate, with wing and drumstick, lay a chicken's heart.

"It is mine," said the Hermit, angrily, "mine, I tell you. It was given to me. I own it. And it never thought an evil thought. It never loved a lie. Take him away," he added, in an altered, troubled voice, looking up appealingly with his wild old eyes into Dolo's face. "He makes me

hot. He makes me cold. Something beats and hurts me in the head. He is an impostor."

Even Dolo had felt constrained to apologize, as she walked away with the baffled physician.

"It is because you are a stranger," she said. But her companion's lower lip gave its nervous twitch of disapproval—an ugly motion, Dolo thought, observing it.

"It's a case for the state mad-house," he declared.

"Oh, you mustn't send him there!" exclaimed Dolo, in terror; "he would die."

"Hm! He isn't likely to live forever, anywhere," muttered the physician, intending to look into the case more thoroughly on some subsequent visit to the island. He was in haste that day. But he was a busy man, with whom haste was a chronic malady, and the pressure of other cares crowded the matter from his mind.

It occurred to Dolo, standing on the edge of the bluff, that she might as well give up going to people to get help. She would try giving help next and see what came of that. So she went back home and rummaged stealthily in the pantry until she had found a loaf of bread and the half of a boiled tongue. She trespassed upon these only so far as was needful to make two sandwiches and, adding a cup of milk, slipped away with her spoils.

The Hermit welcomed her approach with the customary brightening of his dull eyes, and smiled his wan, piteous smile over the supper she displayed. He was crouching in the doorway of his hut, as usual, but he had drawn the old butternut coat closely around him and moaned with the cold. Dolo tugged a buffalo robe out from the interior of the hut and folded it as best she could about his shoulders. He seemed grateful, but was little inclined to talk, rocking himself to and fro and crooning his ballad over and over, as if oblivious of Dolo's presence.

When she finally rose to go, however, his shaking hands caught at her dress.

"I must tell you," he said, speaking in a mysterious undertone and drawing her nearer that she might hear; "I have seen his face."

"Whose face?" asked Dolo.

"For three nights," repeated the Hermit's quavering voice, "I have seen his face. It is the little wood-sawyer in the corner. He has been sawing there so many, many years. But the stick is nearly sawed through now. It will fall soon. Ah, soon, soon, soon. And for three nights he has turned his face and looked at me."

Dolo had a vague remembrance that they had talked of this fantastic personage before.

"How does he look at you?" she asked.

The Hermit glanced with terrified eyes first over one shoulder and then over the other.

"Are any of the evil faces listening? Are they peeping and mocking?" he whispered.

Dolo felt an uncomfortable shudder run through her, but answered with commendable firmness—

"Not one."

"He looks," whispered the Hermit, "kind. I had not thought that he would look kind. But his eyes are gentle and they smile. They do not try to spring on me, like the eyes in the evil faces. They quiet a long pain. I have forgotten what made the pain, but his eyes quiet it."

Dolo moved again to go, for she feared the Hermit was becoming over-weary, and again the withered fingers clung to her frock.

"Let me tell you. Let me tell you. Last night the little wood-sawyer turned and smiled on me. And then he pointed with his arm. And I looked. And there was a great light. The evil faces all fled away. I have not seen them since. And in the center of the light was a tall doorway, dark, ebon-dark. I was afraid and hid my head under the buffalo robe. But when I looked again, the doors were parted and a woman stood there—a woman with a face all shining, and in a long, white robe. And she held out her hands to me. And then I was not afraid."

"Had you ever seen her before?" asked Dolo, in a low voice.

The old man shook his white head vaguely.

"I do not know. I cannot remember."

Dolo was alarmed. She had never known the Hermit to talk so eagerly and rapidly. She wondered if he were about to have a fever, like Nick, and she wished he had liked the doctor. She sat down beside him on the step and gave him his supper, holding the morsels of bread and meat to his lips, as one would feed a little child, and occasionally coaxing him to take a drink of the milk. He ate submissively and afterwards let Dolo lead him into the hut, where he fell heavily on his rough bed. The child covered him as warmly as she could with the buffalo robes, placed water within his reach, looked sorrowfully at the cracks and knot-holes in the crazy walls, softly bade the Hermit good-night and reluctantly left him there alone.

She walked slowly homeward in the twilight, thinking that she must surely bring Grandma Brimblecomb to-morrow to look at the poor old man and see if he were really ill. He might not distrust her, as he had distrusted the physician. And she would talk over plans for the winter with Uncle Maurice. The boys could patch up the walls of the hut, but it was a forlorn, desolate

place at best. It was just possible that her father would consent to shelter the Hermit under his roof during the harshest weather. After all, it was better that she should remain on the island. No one else could care for the Hermit so well, and he would be very lonely if she should go away. It was good to feel herself needed, and Dolo raised her head, with a happier light in her eyes than they had known that day, and saw Nat coming on an awkward run to meet her. Even in the uncertain light, she noted that his face was suffused with joy and pride.

"Oh, Dolo!" he panted, "what do you think I've got to tell you? Father has been offered an editorial department in *The Eagle Review*, and we are going to spend the winter in New York, father and mother and Nick and I. Robert and Eric are to stay here and look after the place, boarding at Cap'n Noll's, but I'm to study. Your father spoke a good word for me there. Eric wants to stay, and Rob—oh, the place couldn't get along without Rob. But mother is so glad to get Nick off the island. And I'm wild to go. But the best of all is that it's father who has brought all this about. Haven't I always told you that my father could do anything under the sun, if he only would? Of course he can. You just ought to read what that head editor says about his articles."

And Nat, stammering, blushing, triumphant, tripped up over his own legs and suddenly sat down on the sand.

Dolo did not laugh. She felt as if she should never laugh again. She hated Nat. She hated Del. She hated all the world. She set her white teeth savagely, clenched her small brown fists and sped away like the wind, leaving the bewildered boy still sitting on the sand, rubbing his eyes with his knuckles and wondering ruefully what he had said to put Dolo out of temper.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE MIDNIGHT ALTAR.

Into a little pyre
The twigs she built and, swiftly kindling fire,
Set it alight, and with her head bent low
Sat patiently and watched the red flames grow,
Till it burned bright and lit the dreary place.

— WILLIAM MORRIS.

THE kitchen clock had struck eight, and Del was still sitting in a happy little heap on the floor beside Miss Lucas' chair eagerly discussing the deeds to be done on the morrow.

“Two school dresses and a best dress! Just think of it!” she chattered. “The best dress must be blue, oh, please, Miss Lucas. And if only I could have a blue ribbon on my hat to match!”

The housekeeper's phlegmatic countenance took on a shade of anxiety.

“We must get goods that will wear,” she said.
“Oh, if they're pretty, I don't care how long

they last," replied Del, cheerfully; "I would be so careful of a nice blue dress. Oh, you can't think how careful I would be. But I'll tell you something naughty, if you'll promise beforehand to forgive me. I gave my last cloth cap before this one to Major to chew up. It wouldn't wear out any other way, and it was so homely. But the next day you sent over to the coast by Rob and got me another just like it."

"It might be her own mother's voice," mused Mr. Rexford, as he sat in his study with the door ajar. He tried to make it appear, even to himself, that he had left the door unlatched by accident. In reality he was listening, with a mist over his eyes, to every word that Del was saying. "After all," his thought ran on, "this love of dress is a harmless vanity. It is only one phase of the love of beauty and is not incompatible with nobler phases, such as the love of beauty in nature or in conduct. I never misjudged Mary for it when I was by her side. It was only when I was maddening in those accursed prison walls that I lost my understanding of her character—that I came to forget in her all but her heedless, childlike extravagance and delight in the follies of society. She had never been trained to anything else. And I let her think I liked it, too. I let her think that money grew in my pockets. If she broke

my fortunes, it is true, as James Grafton said, that I broke her heart. And I sinned against her at the first hardly less than at the last. I have always thought that in those early years I loved her only too well. I begin to see that even then I loved her too little. For love means trust and truth, and I gave her neither. Mary, Mary! Do you hear me? Do you pity? Can you forgive? The man you loved has shown himself so all unworthy of your love. I have failed as a citizen. I have failed as a father. But it is toward you, my wife, that I have failed most grievously."

He let fall his arms upon his desk, dropped his prematurely white head upon them and did not raise it again until the clock struck nine. Then he arose, passed his hand wearily across his forehead and stepped out, as if seeking comfort, into the living-room.

Miss Lucas sat half asleep in her chair, mechanically clicking her knitting-needles. Del's blithesome voice was still running on like a silver-sounding brook.

"And are these the people that have to take such an early start to-morrow morning?" asked Mr. Rexford. "Nine o'clock!"

Del sprang to her feet with a gesture of astonishment.

"Why! I never dreamed it was so late," she

said. "Poor Miss Lucas! How I have been boring you! But I am so happy about to-morrow. Only—only—are you quite sure, father, you ought to give us so much money to spend?"

"It is your mother's money," said Mr. Rexford, slowly; "the little that she had in her own right is what we have been living on all these years. It is only a little, but our wants are few and it suffices."

"If there should be something left over to-morrow," asked Del, hesitatingly, "couldn't I get some little present for Dolo? She likes pretty things, too. And you know it was her choice that I should go. I should like so much to bring her back a nice handkerchief, or bright ribbon to wear at her throat. Cherry would be a good color for Dolo."

"If you bring me a cherry ribbon, or anything else, I'll take the scissors and snip it into a thousand pieces," spoke out most unexpectedly a defiant voice from the top of the ladder, where the startled eyes of the family now for the first time discerned among the shadows the glimmer of a white night-dress.

"Eavesdropping again?" asked Mr. Rexford, sternly. "You need not fear that you will be troubled with gifts, after such a speech as that. Go back to your bed directly."

There was no answer, but the glimmer of the white night-dress disappeared.

"Oh, father," pleaded Del, ready to cry, "I don't think Dolo is well. She didn't eat a single bit of supper and she went up-stairs as soon as we left the table."

"A little fasting will not hurt her," said Mr. Rexford, sternly.

"Maybe she feels sorry, now that it is nearly time for me to go, that she decided it that way," suggested Del, with quivering lip.

"You need not concern yourself," replied her father, carelessly; "I have never seen any signs that she was troubled by the mania of self-sacrifice. If she had cared to go, you may depend upon it that she would have decided differently. She likes a wild life, and is well enough off on the island."

Dolo, sitting sulkily in the deeper shadows a little space back from the top of the ladder, choked down a great, angry lump in her throat.

"Here is your light," said Miss Lucas to Del, blinking like an owl as she handed the girl a tallow dip in a battered tin candlestick.

"That is a hint worth the taking," said Mr. Rexford. "Good-night."

"Good-night, father. Thank you so much for everything," replied Del, glancing up shyly

into the dark, deeply-chiseled face so far above her.

Mr. Rexford would have been glad to stoop and kiss his daughter, but a stiffness of years is not so easily eradicated from the backbone, and he had not kissed Del since she was a baby. To Dolo, who had been born in the first month of his imprisonment, he had never given a fatherly caress. So he returned to his study, ashamed of the yearning pain about his heart, and strove to find again his sterner self in the domain of mathematics.

Del, on entering the little chamber which the sisters shared, beheld Dolo tucked up in bed, apparently fast asleep. Del had her suspicions of that peaceful slumber, but she carefully shaded the candle with a gay feather-fan which was one of Cap'n Noll's parting keepsakes, undressed herself swiftly and quietly, blew out the flickering flame, knelt a few minutes at the bedside and then crept softly in beside her sister.

"Good-night, Dolo," she murmured, but no word nor motion made response, and Del, patting wistfully the end of the long black braid, nestled her bright head deep in the pillow and, notwithstanding her eager anticipation of the morrow, fell presently into a refreshing sleep. There was no sign of waking life in the room, after that, until the kitchen clock struck ten.

Then Dolo cautiously raised herself upon her elbow and peered out into the shadows with burning, sleepless eyes.

"Oh, how stupid it is to be good!" It was something in this fashion that the hot, tumultuous thoughts went surging through her brain. "I tried to be good. I tried. I tried. Nobody knows how hard I wanted to go. Nobody cares. But I thought it would be selfish and I chose for Del. I wish I hadn't. It is silly to be good. Everybody supposes I didn't care and worse things keep happening to me all the time. I tried to please God and he just takes advantage of it. But I won't stand everything. No, I won't. I'm awfully wicked. I'm glad of it. Maybe God will strike me dead. I don't care if he does. Perhaps there isn't any God, anyhow. I read in one of Uncle Maurice's books—he didn't tell me I might—that some wise men over in England and Germany and places think astronomy made the world, and we people are just monkeys in clothes. Father told me the other day that I acted like a monkey. I wonder how he would have liked it if I'd told him he acted like a bear. 'Twould have been as true as what he said and just as polite. I almost hope there really isn't any God. I don't believe there can be. If there was, he wouldn't forget all about a girl who had

tried so hard to do right. He would let nice things happen to her afterward, and not horrid things. But nothing nice ever happens to me. Father doesn't love me. Maybe he's beginning to love Del, but he doesn't love me. And I do more for him than Del ever thought of doing. I dusted his old books only this morning, when he was out for his walk before breakfast. I wish now I had left pepper on them instead of the dust. It's no fair in father to love Del and not love me. We're both his children. Everybody loves Del, except the Hermit, and I suppose he's going to die. God doesn't want that there should be anybody alive to love me. And I tried to be good. I try oftener than people think, but I don't seem to make out much. It's easy for Del to be good. She never tried in all her life half as hard as I tried the other day. And I did it, too. I didn't make the selfish choice. But nobody thinks I cared. Nobody thinks anything about me anyway. It is always Del. It must be so comfortable to be Del. People love her for being pretty and sweet-tempered, and she couldn't be anything else, if she wanted to. Things aren't fair. I hate this world. I hate to live. If I grow up on Hermit Island, without Uncle Maurice to teach me, I shall just be a cross, stupid, ugly woman, and Del will be a lady like mamma. Oh, if

mamma had only stayed with us! Mamma used to love me. Mamma used to hold me close and kiss me all over my face. Nobody ever has since. Nobody ever will again. I wish I could die to-night and go to mamma. But she went to heaven and I'm so wicked God will send me way off into the dark. I don't care. He needn't be so mean to me here, anyhow. I tried to do right, and he doesn't even leave me Uncle Maurice. There'll be no new books any more, and nobody to teach me anything. Nat is so glad to go. He would be glad never to see Hermit Island or anybody on it again. I know he would. I don't care how soon he goes. I hope he'll not ever, ever come back. I wish Del would go to-morrow for good and all. I wish she was gone already—and Nat, and Uncle Maurice, and Aunt Marion, and Nick, and everybody else. Oh, I'm so tired! God doesn't even let me go to sleep, when my head aches so, and my eyes are like fire, but here Del went right off to sleep almost as soon as her head touched the pillow. Pshaw! Del thought she was so mighty generous to buy herself three new dresses and a hat and all the rest of it and then bring me home a stingy little strip of cherry ribbon. And father scolded me, because I didn't simper and say I was so much obliged. Father scolds me every chance he gets. I won't be

scolded into being good, though. The more he scolds, the worse I'll be. I shall never, never, never try to be good again. It doesn't pay. It's better to be bad. I don't believe mamma, way off in heaven, knows whether I'm good or not. I wish there was some awfully, awfully wicked thing I could do, like setting the house on fire, or cutting off all Del's hair while she's asleep, or chopping holes in every one of the boats, so that they can't go over to the coast to-morrow. I'll do something. I'm going to turn wicked. Trying to do right is no use at all. God only takes advantage of you and sends you more troubles, and more and more, because he knows you'll bear 'em. But I won't bear 'em. No, I won't. What can I do to be wicked? What dreadful thing is there that I can do?"

And Dolo, falling back on her pillow, stared into the dark with fierce black eyes, until the kitchen clock struck eleven.

Then the child rose on her elbow again and leaned over Del, listening to the soft, regular breathing until she was satisfied that her sister's slumbers were genuine and deep. Next lifting herself cautiously to her knees, she pulled up the quilt to cover her vacant place and, creeping down to the foot of the bed, climbed with her own peculiar, stealthy agility over the foot-board.

Then she stole about the room in the darkness, finding her garments one by one and drawing them on deliberately, without sign of nervousness. She even had the forethought to clothe herself more warmly than usual, donning an extra skirt and throwing a heavy shawl, compactly folded, over her arm. She did not put on shoes and stockings, however, for the shoes would be noisy on the ladder. When she was dressed, she stood for a moment lost in thought. Then she approached the bed and, reaching over Del's unconscious head, took her own pillow. She drew off the unbleached cotton case and used this as a bag, filling it from a little chest in the corner where she kept her most sacred treasures. There were books which Uncle Maurice had given her at various Christmastides and birthdays—the books which had made her, when she read them, want to be good—"Water Babies," "Rab and his Friends," "Story of a Short Life," "The Back of the North Wind," "The Little Lame Prince," and the "Pilgrim's Progress". There were some illuminated Scripture texts that had been given her at Sunday School when she was a little girl in the infant class, and there was the dainty Bible, with her name lettered in gilt on the cover, that had been hung for her by a very intelligent Santa Claus, who knew not only

what she wanted most, but even how her name ought to be spelled, on the great, candle-lighted Christmas Tree in the church. There were two manuscript books, too, each written half through in a childish pencil-scrawl. One was the "Good Resolution Book" and the other the "Diary of my Soul". There was a well-worn pair of Merry's baby-socks, a bracket stained with blood from the cut awkward Nat had inflicted upon himself in whittling it out for her, and a sheet of paper on which she had written down the Hermit's ballad. There was a delicate, lace-edged handkerchief, too, that had been her mother's, and an embroidered, fairy-like glove, with a faint perfume still clinging to it. There had always been sachets lying in her mother's glove-box. There was something else, besides, that Dolo's groping little hand closed upon tightest of all. She did not pack this away in the pillow-case, but slipped it inside the bosom of her dress.

And then, lifting her bag with its varied contents over her shoulder, Dolo passed like a furtive shadow from the room.

So far, so good, but how that stair-ladder did creak! And what possessed the boards in the floor below, that they should groan and crack under her swift, light steps? Dolo had never heard those boards so much as squeak in the

daytime, but now it was positively a racket—an uproar. The cold perspiration started all over Dolo's body. The inexplicable noises made by those tell-tale boards would certainly bring her father out upon her. He had not gone up to bed. A light still shone from under the study door. Dolo ground her teeth together and shot a glance of desperate defiance at that tranquil ray. But there was no sound from the study, and the girl, carefully avoiding contact with chairs or table, made her way to the outside door. Fortunately for her purpose, locks and bolts were never used on Hermit Island, and the rude latch yielded readily to the pressure of her hand. She swung the door open as far as she dared, but even then the bag upon her shoulder, so heavily freighted with books, scraped and bumped in passing through. Dolo, in her dismay, almost lost her hold of the door. Ah, if she had! If she had let it slam! But she closed it so softly that it scarcely jarred. She let fall the latch so gently that it hardly clicked. And then, drawing a long, deep breath, she balanced her burden more evenly across her back, clutched the crumpled end of the pillow-case tightly in both hands, threw back her head with a free, wild motion and raced away from the house as if she were pursued by a legion of angry fathers.

In point of fact, however, Mr. Rexford, entirely undisturbed, sat calmly at his desk, far too intent on the movements of the heavenly bodies to trace the eccentric orbit of a certain very terrestrial little body that even then was fleeing with glittering eyes away from the refuge of his roof into the sable gloom of midnight.

The sea-wind smote Dolo with so biting a cold that she paused for a moment, when she had reached the beach, and muffled her head and shoulders in the shawl she had brought on her arm. The air still blew chill on her uncovered legs and feet, but she ran too fast to incur much danger of taking cold in them.

The night was cloudy and very dark. Dolo was like an Indian, however, in the keenness of all her senses. She could make her way by feeling and by hearing almost as unerringly as by sight. On her right hand arose the dim shadow of the bluff, and on her left was the long, wavering line of surf, ever parting and reuniting, startlingly white against the blackness. The roar of the breaking waters, the unceasing chime of ocean, was the only sound to be heard, and this was to the island maiden's ears a sound at once so familiar and so solemn that it seemed to throw the silence into still more terrible relief.

To Dolo the silence was very desolation. She

felt herself alone in the wide universe, shut off from God, from her mother, from all holy influences, human or angelic, but she sped on along the wet, cold sands, with straining muscles and passionate, rebellious heart, a flying shape that seemed to cut for itself a passage through the dense profound of night.

She could not have been far from the Hermit's hut, when she turned abruptly and ran toward the bluff. Surely she would not try, encumbered with her bag and shawl, to climb that slippery steep in the darkness. Such evidently was no part of her intention, for she halted when she was within touching distance of the sandy bank and knelt upon the ground, curling up her shivering legs beneath her. She let down the laden pillow-case from her shoulder, turned its contents out upon the sand, shook it by the corners to make sure that it was empty, and then flung it aside. For what was she searching in her pocket? Matches? Even in that perilous crossing of the creaking floor, she had remembered to reach up to the mantel-shelf and possess herself of a card of matches. She broke the card and rubbed the pieces together until the ends ignited. Then she made a blaze from the illuminated Scripture texts and the ballad sheet, and set the books, wide-open, around it, fluttering the leaves back and forth.

One after another they caught fire, the green and gilt Bible first of all, and blazed brightly there in the heart of the midnight, while Dolo, her dark little face working strangely in the ruddy light, flung upon this altar of unholy sacrifice the bracket and the socks, the glove and the handkerchief, and last of all a card photograph of her mother, worn by childish kisses. This she drew from her bosom and threw into the core of the fire. Another instant, and she had thrust her hand in after it; but it was too late. She snatched back her hand burned and smarting, but the picture was irretrievably gone. With a moan like that of a wounded animal, Dolo started to her feet and tossing up her arms above her head, an uncanny, witchlike little image in the circle of red light that was walled all about with blackness, prayed aloud the most extraordinary prayer ever voiced on Hermit Island.

“Evil Spirit, whoever you are, I am yours. Take me and make me wicked. I have sacrificed to you here in the fire all the things that belong to the good part of me. If I knew how, I would burn that up, too. I hate goodness. I want to be wicked. I want to curse Del and Nat and all the people who are happy. Please bring trouble on them. Amen.”

Then the child ceased, appalled at her own

words. She looked down upon the fire which had already consumed the most of its precious, irrecoverable fuel. She looked out upon the encompassing darkness, now fast closing in upon her, as if to claim her for its own. The ocean peal was like the sad, majestic, reproachful voice of God. A sudden agony of fright seized upon her. Forgetful of the pillow-case, regardless of the still burning fire, she sprang away and rushed homeward over the beach, the shawl trailing heavily behind her. The horror of that flight! The blackness of the night was hideous. The air seemed thick with demons, that pressed upon her and caught at her as she ran. Each little bare toe curled in mortal dread of feeling itself clutched. The girl was mad with terror and beat the air with her raised arms, while she dashed along, as if warding off invisible enemies. It seemed an eternity before she stood panting on the cottage threshold. Too faint with fear to be over-wary, she staggered in and stumbled up the ladder, not noting whether boards creaked or not or even whether a light shone out from under the study door.

But the household, wrapt in slumber, was as oblivious of her entrance as of her exit. Safe at last in her own room, within sound of Del's soft breathing, she undressed with chilly hands, shak-

ing from head to foot, let her clothes lie wherever they chanced to fall, and crept miserably into bed. Oppressed by a ghastly sense of guilt, feeling utterly forsaken of hope and holiness and heaven, the wretched child nestled up to her sister for very loneliness.

"Why, Dolo, how cold you are!" murmured Del, drowsily, and folded her closely in her warm young arms.

"She would not touch me if she knew," thought Dolo, wearily, but without trying to move away. Her feelings all seemed dull and languid and she soon dropped asleep from sheer exhaustion, her dark head resting on her sister's shoulder. Even through her dreams, however, she heard the organ-voice of the sea, following her like the rebuke of God.

CHAPTER XIV.

TAKEN AT HER WORD.

Black is the beauty of the brightest day;
The golden ball of heaven's eternal fire,
That danc'd with glory on the silver waves,
Now wants the fuel that inflam'd his beams;
And all with faintness, and for foul disgrace,
He binds his temples with a frowning cloud.

— CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE.

That shady day,
Dark with more clouds than tempests are.

— RALPH WALDO EMERSON.

DEL was aroused from her rosy slumbers by the kitchen clock striking five. She had a drowsy sense that it was unusually dark for that hour, and then turning snugly in her bed, was composing herself for another nap, when across her mind flashed the exciting thought that this was the day for her trip to the mainland. In an instant she was upon her feet, wide-awake, dressing with all the energy of young anticipation.

Yet in the progress of her rapid toilet she did not fail to note, with surprise and perplexity, that Dolo's treasure-chest stood open and empty and that Dolo's clothes were scattered about the floor in confusion, instead of being hung across a chair, as they were when Del went to bed. The warm shawl, too, for which Del searched vainly in its accustomed drawer, she found lying in a heap under Dolo's dress. Del cast an inquiring glance toward her sister, but Dolo was sleeping heavily. And Del, her mind too full of projects to entertain difficult questions, soon dismissed the subject from her thoughts and ran lightly down the ladder. But early as she was, Miss Lucas had been before her, and hot coffee, toast and slices of cold tongue stood on the dining-table.

"Oh, goody!" exclaimed Del, careful, however, to speak in a lowered tone, so that her father and sister might not be disturbed; "we sha'n't keep the boys waiting a single minute, shall we?"

"I doubt whether the boys cross to-day," suggested Miss Lucas, who was standing by the window. "It is a dull morning. See how heavy the clouds are over yonder."

"Oh, but the boys wouldn't mind a little speck of cloud," protested Del, her eager face falling as she gazed with rueful eyes at the dark masses of drift in the eastern sky; "and I shall die if we

can't go to-day. I really shall. Here come Rob and Nat, now."

The lads tramped in shivering with the cold, although well wrapt in rough sailor-coats, and readily accepted an invitation to take cups of coffee. But the talk and laughter, by command of Del, who was careful, for more reasons than one, not to awaken her father, was very quiet.

"Pretty raw and chilly out," said Robert, cheerily, leaning against the mantel and rubbing his big brown hands together; "and the morning is about as dark as they make 'em. The day may clear, but I don't like to take any risks with you two passengers along. Guess we'd better put it off till to-morrow."

"But to-morrow's Sunday," protested Del, pouting as she passed the coffee, "and Monday's an eternity away. Oh, the day will clear. I know it will. Please let's go. Oh, Rob, please!"

It was hard to resist that word and tone, and Robert looked doubtfully over the rim of his coffee-cup at Nat.

"We might drop in and ask Cap'n Noll to take a squint at the sky and tell us what he thinks of it," observed Nat. "He'll hold up his finger in the air to feel which way the wind blows and look as wise as a meeting-house weather-cock."

"Oh, no, no, no! Don't go near Cap'n Noll,"

pleaded Del, knowing well that her bluff old friend would never consent to the slightest imprudence where his Lady Blue-eyes was concerned. "Come on, boys! Let's hurry off. I've had all the breakfast I want. Don't stand there balancing your spoon in that stupid way, Rob. I am sure it will be a pleasant day and, if it isn't, Miss Lucas and I don't care. Do we, Miss Lucas? Please get your things on quick. I'm all ready now, except my cap. And the boys have had as much coffee as is good for them."

"Not to mention the fact that we've had all there is," added Nat. "What will your father think of an empty coffee-pot?"

"Oh, Dolo can look after his breakfast, for once," answered Del, whisking about the room for cap and shawl and purse and water-proof bag and memorandum. "There! I do believe I've got everything, now. But where's Eric? Isn't Eric going?"

"No," said Robert; "he must see to the cows and, besides, there's no room for him to-day. I half believe it's his sulks that are working all this mischief with the weather. He was crosser than a crab because I wouldn't take him instead of this Daddy Longlegs here, but Nat's stronger at the oars, when the fellow is really rowing and not wool-gathering, and besides, Nat has a letter of

father's to mail—a letter which he wouldn't trust to one of his unworthy brethren for his eye-teeth."

Nat clapped his hand proudly upon his breast-pocket.

"It's father's letter of acceptance," he said.

"What?" asked Del. "What do you mean?"

"Why!" stammered Nat, indignantly; "why, didn't Dolo tell you last night? Didn't Dolo tell you the great news? Well, if she isn't the queerest girl that ever I saw!"

"It's precious few you ever saw, anyway, you near-sighted island bat," interposed Robert.

"But tell me, tell me!" cried Del, imperiously. "Oh, is it something nice about Uncle Maurice? I'm so glad. Here's Miss Lucas at last. We can start now and you must tell me as we walk down to the boats."

And such was the compelling power of the little damsel's will that Robert and Nathan, absorbed in relating their wonderful tidings and listening to Del's enthusiastic comments, walked directly past Cap'n Noll's cottage and across the island, down to where the dories were drawn up side by side on the beach, each fastened by a stout rope to one of the stakes driven deep into the sand above the high-tide limit. But here Robert made a stand.

"This is all wrong," he said, decidedly. "We ought to have Cap'n Noll's advice and Mr. Rexford's consent. I won't stir this boat an inch without them. You wait here till I come back. You can dance a hornpipe to keep you warm."

Del caught at the rough coat sleeve and held him fast.

"You old fuss!" she exclaimed; "look at the East, now."

It was a fact that the dark masses of cloud were cleft and through the narrow aperture the sunlight was making way. The sight, take it all in all, was a singular one. Although not a shower had fallen on the island, the coast was completely hidden in black, slanting lines of rain. The storm could be watched sweeping darkly westward over the water. But as the shaft of sunshine broke through the orient clouds, the wavy edges of the deep, mysterious rift were irradiated by a lustre of white light. One could gaze far up into the depths of that bright opening and note the peaks and domes and minarets of cloud that jutted forth, glistening with the crystal radiance. The sea, at first cold and leaden in lustre, now showed tints of green and silver, and even, far to the eastward, of rose and violet.

"There! You see?" said Del. "The clouds

are breaking. It is going to be just the loveliest day that ever was."

"One sunbeam doesn't make fair weather," objected Robert; "and it's pouring over there on the coast."

"Well, what if it is?" retorted Del, "are you afraid of hurting this elegant coat of yours, or of getting the blacking washed off your boots?"

This last was a hard hit, for Robert and Nathan were, as usual, bare-footed, and Del, having donned shoes and stockings in honor of the great occasion, felt superior.

"But Miss Lucas isn't a fish, if you are. She doesn't want to go shopping in the rain," persisted Robert, yet more feebly, as he watched the alabaster glory widening in the East.

"Miss Lucas doesn't mind," urged Del, turning blue eyes bright with entreaty on the imperturbable housekeeper; "do you, Miss Lucas?"

Miss Lucas meditated. "We have a water-proof bag for the things, and our clothes won't spot," she said. "Besides, I have brought an umbrella."

"Well!" said Robert, laying his strong hand on the gunwale of the boat, "here goes, then. Untie her, Nat, and we'll trundle her down to the water."

The starting was great fun. Miss Lucas and

Del were seated in the bows, Nat took his place at the oars, while Robert, rolling up his trousers, stood at the stern knee-deep in water tugging and straining, as the wave receded, to shove the dory off. The boat, sullen at first, suddenly leapt upward and forward, borne seaward on the crest of the ebbing billow, while Robert, splashed and laughing, followed with a skip and a scramble and swung himself aboard, amid a duet of merry and derisive congratulations from Del and Nat.

"Whew! But this sea has a swell on her!" whistled Nat, as the boat plunged from crest to trough and was flung again from trough to crest, ploughing her way through the surf; "look out there, Rob! We're shipping water."

"See here!" exclaimed Robert, thoroughly startled, "we are in for a rough crossing. We must put back, Nat, and land our passengers. I don't care if we wait till Monday ourselves."

"Oh, for shame!" exclaimed the girl, who had been screaming with delight as the dory rose and fell; "if I'm not afraid, I shouldn't think you'd be."

"You don't know enough to be afraid," replied Robert, with a good-humored smile. "What do you say, Nat?"

"Father's letter must be mailed this morning," replied Nat, doggedly; "and turning back isn't

much in our line. Likely as not the blow will hold off till to-morrow. Let's go ahead."

But Robert still looked doubtful.

"Shall we risk it?" he asked, appealing to Miss Lucas.

The housekeeper sat as calmly in the bows of that careering little boat, as if she had been paring apples in her high-backed chair at home.

"There's not any too much time for the sewing, as it is," she said.

"There now!" exclaimed Del, clapping her hands. "Three votes for going on! So, Cap'n Rob, you'll please stop croaking and mind the rudder. Oh, to think that we are really off the island! I haven't been off the island for seven years, and neither has Miss Lucas. It would be cruel to go back now."

"All right," said Robert, keeping his anxious gaze fixed upon the East; "we'll be across in three hours at this rate, and if it blusters after that, we'll let it bluster, and spend the night on the coast. Pull your prettiest, Nat. I'll spell you when you're tired."

It was something more than an hour later that Dolo was aroused by hearing her father's voice calling excitedly from below —

"Dolorosa! Dolorosa! Are you there?"

"Yes, sir," she responded, hurriedly, spring-

ing to her feet; "I'll come right down. Is it late?"

"Yes. It was so dark I overslept," responded the deep voice, still with that agitation and trouble sounding through it. "Is Delia with you?"

Dolo looked in bewildered fashion toward the bed and about the room. What did it all mean? What had happened? Had she been having bad dreams? What had she done to her hand? The lid of her sacred treasure-chest thrown up! Her clothes lying about the floor! Del gone, and a torrent of wind and rain beating against the window!

"No, sir," she answered; "isn't Del downstairs?"

"No, nor Miss Lucas," came the response, in a tone that had now a sharp accent of distress; "and the table stands as if they had breakfasted. But it cannot be that those madcap boys have started out to take them across to the mainland in such a hurricane as this! Do you know anything about it? Tell me instantly."

"Nothing, sir," responded a cold voice from above.

Dolo's arms had fallen at her sides. She stood as if carved from stone.

"They cannot have put out in this storm. It is utterly impossible—utterly impossible!"

repeated Mr. Rexford, as if to reassure himself.
"But I will go down to the boats and make sure."

And in a moment more Dolo heard the outside door close noisily, as if blown to by a gust of wind, and from her window she caught sight of her father's tall figure, in rubber coat and cap, dashing at full speed across the field.

Then Dolo fell on her knees before her empty treasure-chest, with a ghastly little face and sinking heart. She remembered it all now. She had been angry with Del and Nat and all the world and had tried to think of the wickedest deed that she could do. And cloudy hints from the old story of Dr. Faustus had come to her mind, and she, too, had determined to formally cede her soul to the spirit of evil. She remembered the midnight rites, the fire, the costly, costly sacrifice, the terrified rush homeward through the demon-peopled dark, the solemn, stern, rebuking call of ocean. But most vividly of all she remembered that she had cursed Del, her sister—yes, Del and Nat. And her new master had taken her at her word. Evidently prayers were promptly answered by the prince of darkness. Or was it the seal of the bargain? He had bought her soul and this was his horrible payment. She had asked for trouble to come on her sister and her old playmate; but oh! she had not meant this, not anything one-half so

terrible as this. They would all be drowned—Del and Nat and Robert and Eric and Miss Lucas—and she would be their murderer. And there would be nothing left in all the world to comfort her, now that her dear mamma's picture was gone. She had murdered that, too. Her own hand had burned it in the fire.

The hand was blistered and full of stinging pains that morning, but Dolo scarcely heeded it. Her soul was possessed by one great horror. Her limbs trembled and were so weak that she made several efforts before she could arise from her kneeling posture in front of the chest. At last she drew herself to her feet, shut and clasped the lid and mechanically went about her dressing.

Then she clambered down the ladder, clinging to it closely and feeling sick and giddy as she went. Below all was chill and desolate. The breakfast table stood spread with the unwashed plates and coffee-cups and with the remains of the toast and tongue. Dolo ate a few morsels of meat to give herself strength. She felt less faint after that and, wrapping herself in an old waterproof cloak, opened the outside door. In an instant the bellowing gale had wrenched it from her grasp and Dolo found herself, with head bent forward and every muscle tense, battling with a furious storm of wind and rain. She fought her

way through it, nevertheless, with white face and desperate eyes, until she stood in sight of the spot where the boats were beached. Cap'n Noll's stout dory and the old fishing-boat were there, but the Yorke dory was gone. Between the black lines of rain she caught a glimpse of her father standing erect and rigid beside the boats, a motionless form on which the fury of the gale spent itself disregarded.

Dolo did not dare, with the awful burden on her childish heart, go and join her father. She staggered a few steps in the direction of Cap'n Noll's cottage and, in the confusion and darkness of the storm, almost ran upon the captain himself, hurrying with great strides to the beach. Close behind him followed Mr. Yorke and Eric.

“Luff a-lee, my hearty!” shouted the captain, rolling to one side; “we came nigh shivering each other's timbers that time. But why are you out, a girl like you, in such a stiffish blow as this?”

“Why are you?” replied Dolo.

“Why?” answered Cap'n Noll, in the roaring voice which was always, as Nat said, his “storm-note”; “here's a man what thinks his boys put out to sea this morning. But I tell him it's no sech a thing. Rob's not a fool, and Nat—well, Nat's not fool enough for sech a move as that.”

“But, captain,” put in Eric, pale and scared,

"it didn't storm when they left the house, though the last thing I heard Rob say to Nat as they went down-stairs was that he guessed they would have to put it off. But it wasn't storming then. I got up and looked. It was only cold and cloudy. And I thought what muffs they would be if they gave it up for that."

"You must remember, captain," added Mr. Yorke, who was paler than Eric, "that the East lightened very curiously and beautifully for a few minutes about six o'clock, and it is only within an hour that the tempest has struck us. It was as sudden as it is violent."

The captain emitted a half-consoling, half-contemptuous growl, but the uproar of wind and sea was not favorable to conversation, and the party pressed on in silence, Cap'n Noll grasping Dolo strongly by the arm. Once Dolo felt, on the other side, a wet hand steal into hers, and turned to meet Eric's shining, frightened eyes.

"Did Del go?"

Dolo never knew whether eyes or voice asked the question. Her own dark eyes, in their agony of fear, answered it, and Eric, with a choking, boyish sob, broke away from the group and rushed forward to the water's edge. The others were soon beside him, Mr. Rexford having joined them on the way.

"My boat is out," said Mr. Yorke, quietly, but his lips were white as he spoke, "and my two eldest sons are in her."

Dolo looked at Eric and felt a vague sense of comfort in now for the first time clearly realizing that he had been left behind. She had one less crime to answer for, and Eric would help Uncle Maurice and Aunt Marion bear their losses. He was a comely, brave-spirited, frank-hearted boy. She was glad that he was standing there on the shore, instead of tossing in the cruel, white sea-foam. The waves would throw Del about easily. She was so light. But Nat would be awkward, even in the act of drowning. And Miss Lucas—would she change that set look of hers? Robert would try to save the others. Robert always thought of himself last. Del's hair would stream like seaweed in the foam. What wild, wretched thoughts were these! But they did not seem to hurt her much. Perhaps her heart was broken already and this was the way people felt with broken hearts. But what was her father saying?

"Yes, Delia must have gone with them, also Miss Lucas. Delia had been eager for the trip."

"No!" exclaimed the captain; "no, not she! Not Lady Blue-eyes! Don't tell me she is in that boat—Lady Blue-eyes! My little Lady of Delight!"

Then they did not look in one another's faces nor speak again, but strove in vain to search the sea with their eyes. The blinding rain hid all but the nearest surf and though they watched each wave as it thundered in, it cast at their feet only a tangle of weeds and shells. There was nothing to be done there, and they all struggled back in silence to the other side of the island, Cap'n Noll, with his hand on Eric's shoulder, for Uncle Maurice had given an arm to Dolo, leading the way to his own cottage.

Thus began a day of such suspense, such restlessness and dread as Hermit Island had never known before. The situation was kept from Mrs. Yorke. She supposed that of course the trip had been given up, and her husband did not undeceive her. He let her believe that the boys were spending their rainy holiday at the captain's, and, though she felt disappointed that they should not come home to dinner, habits of hospitality had so increased on the island since Nick was taken ill that she did not think it strange. Because of her husband's decision to leave the island and undertake literary labors in earnest, she was happier than she had been for years, and sat by Nick's bedside hour by hour singing old-fashioned love-songs or telling stories of her girlhood's home among the hills, with a pink flush on her faded

cheek and a light in her sunken eyes that were as the pathetic shadow of her youthful beauty. She noticed that her husband was wan and silent, as he looked in upon his home for a few minutes from time to time during the day, but his kindly smile came as readily as ever, in response to Nick's wise prattle, his tone to her was even gentler than its wont, and she merely thought, if she theorized upon the subject at all, that he was grave in view of the return from this solitary, dreamy existence that he loved, to the activities and ambitions of what she deemed practical life.

At the Brimblecomb cottage, the hours dragged by as if winged with lead. At intervals, while daylight lasted, one or another of the men would go out to patrol the beach. Dolo knew too well in her shuddering heart for what they were looking—what ghastly drift they thought might be tossed on shore. Then they would talk a little in low, controlled voices, saying over and over the same things—that the dory was well-built, that it would have been in less danger than a sail-boat, that the boys were strong and skillful and courageous, that by to-morrow the captain could go over to the coast and make inquiries. Then they would pace the floor, or throw more drift-wood on the fire, or plunge out into the storm again. Grandma Brimblecomb bustled about preparing

meals which no one, not even Eric, could eat, and plying the exhausted patrolmen, as they came in one by one, drenched to the skin, with hot drinks and dry clothing. Dripping garments hung all day long before the fireplace, and Mr. Rexford and Mr. Yorke moved about with difficulty in the captain's capacious blouses and trousers. Poor Eric had to don one of Grandma Brimblecomb's bright-colored wrappers, in which he looked like a waif from far Japan. Baby Merry, frightened scarcely less by the solemn hush within the house than by the howling tempest without, trotted from one to another for consolation. Mr. Yorke, who was the most self-possessed of them all, lifted her to his knee and told her a fairy-tale, and Mr. Rexford, though his voice broke when he tried to respond to her baby chatter, walked the floor with the child in his arms until she fell asleep. Presently Cap'n Noll came in wet and panting from his tramp, and Mr. Rexford, after darting the one look of fearful inquiry into his eyes and finding there no confirmation of the general dread, laid Baby Merry on the lounge, pulled on his rubber coat and cap and went out to take his turn at the dreary sea-shore vigil. Mr. Yorke had gone over to his own home, to see that all was well with his wife and Nick. Grandma Brimblecomb was stirring some beef tea for Dolo,

whose wild and haggard look troubled the dear old dame. Eric had thrown himself, in his gay-flowered robe, on the floor at Dolo's feet, hoping to get and give a little comfort, but the girl, sitting upright in her chair, with brown hands tightly clasped in her lap and black eyes staring straight before her, had repulsed him rudely. The boy drew away, hurt and almost angry, and took refuge with Major under the lounge. Baby Merry, awakened suddenly by a violent gust of wind that rattled the windows noisily and shook the cottage in every timber, sat up in terror, her little lip quivering, but her plucky baby soul still refusing to confess its fears.

"Gramp," she piped; "if you're 'fraid, I'll come and hold on to your hand."

But for once her grandfather did not notice her. His brows were bent and he was listening to the storm. Baby Merry, bewildered, crept softly to Dolo's side, but Dolo, as she had done several times before during the day, warded the child off with her arm, whispering hoarsely, "Don't touch me!" with such intensity in her look and manner that the puzzled Baby promptly retreated. Grandma Brimblecomb continually fluttered about Dolo, bringing her cordials, feeling her pulse and coaxing her to lie down; but Dolo scarcely seemed to see or to hear her. To the captain's gruff words

of cheer she answered nothing. Uncle Maurice sat down beside her, when he returned, and tried to talk with her, but she buried her face in her hands and would not look at him nor make reply. Her father, later in the afternoon, struck by the misery in her face and attitude, laid his hand upon the black head in passing and bent over his strange little daughter in wistful sympathy; but she shook his touch off so fiercely that he flushed crimson and turned away. Even in the preoccupation of personal grief they all marvelled at Dolo. They said to one another that they had not known she cared for Del so much. And meanwhile the poor, guilt-burdened, desolate child, to whom it seemed as if mere grief must be a beautiful and blessed thing, was conscious of little save the one unspeakable thought beating through and through her weary brain. "If they knew that I had done it! If they knew I was the murderer! Not one of them would ever touch me again—would ever speak gently to me—would ever look kindly at me—if they only knew!"

CHAPTER XV.

GRACE OF PARDON.

Oh, then how bright and quick a light
Doth brush my heart and scatter night!

— HENRY VAUGHAN.

Teach me Thy love to know;
That this new light, which now I see,
May both the work and workman show—
Then by a sunbeam I will climb to Thee.

— GEORGE HERBERT.

HOUSE ahoy! If ever I saw such sleepy-heads! House ahoy!"

It was Robert's voice, Robert's own clear, rich young voice ringing through the glimmering dawn of Sunday morning. There were no ill tidings behind that voice, be sure. It was as blithesome as a trumpet-herald of the sunshine.

The call arose from beneath his father's chamber window. In an instant the window was thrown up and Cap'n Noll's weather-beaten face, beaming with joy, was thrust out over the sill.

"You land-lubber! You rascal, you! Why in the name of the Old Harry did you put out to sea in the face of the heaviest blow of the season, eh? Pretty sailor you are! Don't you know enough to stay in when it rains? You young pirate!"

While the happy captain was still in the midst of his vituperative welcome, the outer door flew open and Grandma Brimblecomb, in the same gay-flowered wrapper that had transformed Eric into a Japanese prince the day before and in a fluted nightcap more awry than ever, clasped Robert with two chubby arms tight about the neck and fell to sobbing on his shoulder.

"Oh, my boy! My dear boy! Bless the Lord! If Jonah had a grandmother, I know just how she felt. Where are the others? Is Del safe—the precious child? And our clever boy Nat? And that faithful soul, Miss Lucas? Tell me quick."

"Every one of them," said Robert, somewhat embarrassed by the nightcap and the warmth of the embrace; "but where are father and mother?"

"They are at our house, dear boy, with Eric. Your mother won't let Eric out of her sight. We kept it from her all yesterday, but at night your father had to tell her, and she was in such a taking I sent them over home for fear Nick would

get wind of it and it might bring back his fever. The captain and I, with Baby, shifted quarters, too, and came over here to look after him. He's slept like an angel all night—the darling! But I take it he's the only one who has. Even Baby Merry has been restless and cried out in her dreams. But have Del and Miss Lucas gone home? I never saw a child suffer like Dolo. Few of us know what a tender heart that girl has, under all her queerness. And where is Nat?"

"Del and Nat and Miss Lucas are over on the coast," replied Robert, gently drawing away from the plump arms that were nearly choking him; "one of the boatmen will bring them across as soon as the tide turns. But I knew you would all be anxious, especially mother, and as soon as the storm went down, an hour or so after midnight, I took the dory and pulled over."

"Oh, but wasn't it dark, dear boy, and rough?"

"Dark and rough both," laughed Robert; "but I was afraid life would be darker and rougher for the rest of you till you knew that the crazy chicks had turned out ducks. Much as ever, though. We hadn't been out half an hour before the tempest struck us. Then we tried our best to pull back, but the tide was against us, and we shipped water so fast it took all hands of us to

bale. I tell you, things looked pretty bad about then. Del cried so hard I told her she would swamp us, but she helped bale like a good one, and so did Miss Lucas. We should have gone to the bottom sure, though, if it hadn't been for a fishing-smack that hove in sight just in time. They had taken in every stitch of sail and were pitching like fun, themselves, but they saw our pickle and hauled us on board by ropes. That was about the liveliest job I ever put through. Del went first, and then Miss Lucas, slung up like bags of meal. Del sang out at every bump, but Miss Lucas never screeched once. Then Nat and I fastened lines to the dory, so the men could hoist her up astern, and went over the ropes ourselves sailor-fashion. Only Nat's long legs got tangled in the lines, and the smack rolled and gave him a ducking. But he had a good grip and came up all right, though I thought for the minute he was done for and wondered how I could ever come home and tell mother. I must be off to her now. It's a shame to leave her to worry a minute longer."

"Don't go howlin' like a nor'easter at her portholes, you swabber!" called the delighted captain after him. "You'll scare her into fits. A sailor that lets himself get cotched in a hurricane half an hour from shore! If ever I saw sech foolish-

ness! You're not fit to sail chips on a mud-puddle."

"Ay, ay, sir!" called back Robert, merrily; "every fool must have his day." And the manly young fellow ran off through the gray dusk in the direction of the Brimblecomb cottage, pursued as far as he could hear by the old seaman's jovial bellow.

Mrs. Yorke, after a long night of wildest, bitterest weeping, had sobbed herself into a brief slumber, still holding fast the hand of Eric, who had fallen asleep in a chair beside her bed; but the father kept vigil still and was standing upon the piazza, his sorrowful, prayerful eyes watching the East for the first fair flush of day, when his eldest son bounded up the steps and clasped him in such a rough-coated, vigorous hug as there was no mistaking for any ghostly greeting.

"My son!" murmured Mr. Yorke. "Thank God! And your brother? Is he alive?"

"Alive! Never more so," answered Robert, so lightly one would not easily have believed how fast the tears were coursing down his sun-burned cheeks. "Trust that fellow for being alive! Nat's all right, father, and the others, too."

"God is good," said Mr. Yorke. "I thought I knew before how well I loved my boys, but yesterday and this last night have taught me many

things. Let me go now and break this blessed news to your mother."

But when Mrs. Yorke had wept her fill of joyful tears on Robert's strong young shoulder, when his loving arms had folded her close, and his cheery voice, like sweetest music in his mother's ears, had told her all his story, when Eric had been well tousled and tumbled for his impertinent comments, then Mr. Yorke hurried the rescued lad away to lighten the heavy hearts beneath the Rexford roof.

That desolate cottage had been unvisited of slumber all the night. Neither Mr. Rexford nor Dolo had gone to their respective rooms. Dolo could not bear to enter the chamber where she had slept the night before with Del's warm arm thrown over her, where the empty treasure-chest stood to reproach her with the ruin she had wrought. She had sat all night on the wood-box, close up in the chimney corner, rigid and wretched. She thought that she should never sleep again.

Her father, pacing the floor and glancing now and then, by the dim lamplight, at the dining-table still spread with the remnants of that hasty morning meal, had a certain sense of comfort in Dolo's presence. He was surprised and touched at the depth of feeling the girl was showing.

Once he brought a cushion, and once a shawl, but she refused each by a quick motion of the hand. She did not wish to be made comfortable. She did not wish any care or kindness. She deserved every misery that body or soul could bear. And not one of the mourners on the island, good as they had been to her all the day, would ever help or pity her again, if they knew that it was she who had done the murder. For years passed over Dolo's head before she ceased to believe that the storm was sent by the spirit of darkness in answer to her impious midnight prayer.

A sudden knock came at the outer door. Mr. Rexford started.

“Perhaps her body has been washed ashore,” was the sickening thought that flashed across his mind.

But Dolo sprang with kindling eyes to her feet. “Rob! It is Rob's knock.”

Mr. Rexford took three great strides to the door and flung it open. There stood Robert, veritable flesh and blood, smiling brightly in the clear gleam of morning. The coarse shades had been drawn in the dining-room and the watchers there had not realized that the sable night had melted into golden day. But the pure, fresh light poured into the dreary room, making the lamp-flame yellow and dim. The cool, sweet air

smote on that heavy atmosphere like courage on despair.

Before Mr. Rexford could speak Dolo had sprung before him and clutched Robert's coat-sleeve.

"Del?" she asked, with a wild, beseeching glance. "Del?"

"Del is safe," said Robert, simply, looking with his frank gaze straight into the distressful eyes and placing his big palm comfortingly over the little hand that grasped his sleeve; "Del is safe, and Miss Lucas, and Nat. They will all be here before noon. Pshaw! don't faint away! Wait till Grandma Brimblecomb comes. Whatever shall we do with you? Here, Mr. Rexford, a glass of water, quick! No, no; don't throw it in her face! Gracious! She's in more danger of being drowned now than Del ever was."

But Dolo, gasping and choking under the liberal shower-bath to which her father, with a zeal that outran discretion, had treated her, did not faint. She burst out crying instead. She had supposed—poor child!—that she should never shed another tear, but now she threw herself upon the floor in such a passion of sobs and weeping that her father and Robert were utterly dismayed. Jesting, coaxing, scolding, all these having failed in turn, her father stooped and, with a great soft-

ening of the heart, unceremoniously gathered up his little daughter into his arms and sat down in a chair with the astonished child held firmly against his breast.

“Now put your head down on my shoulder and cry your trouble out,” he said; “I want to listen to Robert’s story.”

And Robert, taking the hint, took a chair as well and related his adventures once again, feeling, as he laughingly remarked, like a new edition of the Arabian Nights. As the recital went on, Dolo’s convulsive sobs gradually subsided and at the close she was lying motionless and silent, with her pale face hidden against her father’s coat-collar, too tired to speak or think—only vaguely conscious how good it was to feel those protecting arms around her.

The others did not arrive until late in the forenoon. Eric, mounted on a tipsy barrel, which Dolo considerately steadied for him on the highest point of the bluff, had been sweeping the horizon with Cap’n Noll’s spy-glass for two hours before his search was rewarded. But when the news finally flew over the island that a boat was in sight, coming across from the coast, great was the excitement which prevailed. Mrs. Yorke confided her petted Nick, in default of a human nurse, to Major’s guardianship, and hurried down

to the beach, leaning on her husband's arm. Mr. Rexford was there, and the captain and Dolo, who looked so wan that Robert threw down his coat on the wet sand and made her recline on its rough and somewhat briny folds. Eric was beside himself with joy, standing on his head and clapping his feet, walking out on his hands into the surf, waving his hat and shouting himself hoarse in the voice and purple in the face long before a single figure in the boat could be distinguished. Grandma Brimblecomb was occupied in preparing a general feast, not of the fatted calf, but of Eric's two plumpest chickens, and could not, being high priestess of the kitchen, forsake the savory mysteries of the gravy-pan; but Baby Merry trotted gleefully down as her representative, flourishing the stars and stripes. Dolo snatched the child into her arms, flag and all, and covered the roguish little face with kisses, until Baby Merry felt assured that the world was its own sunshiny self again.

"Yesterday's all gone, isn't it?" asked the mite, cuddling up close in Dolo's embrace.

"Oh, I hope so," sighed poor Dolo, fervently.

"Where's it gone?" persisted the small philosopher; "where do the yesterdays go to when the to-days come?"

Dolo shook her head, and Baby Merry, alarmed

at seeing the look of pain clouding once more the dear dark eyes, hastened to change the subject.

"Oh, I see," the sage cherub remarked, in an off-hand manner, pounding Eric's legs with her flag-stick; "you don't know. 'Spect likely that's one of the things nobody knows but God. Never mind! He'll tell us when we go to Heaven. That's time 'nough."

The boat came nearer and nearer. Bending strongly to the oars was the same grizzled fisherman of uncertain temper who had brought Mr. Grafton to the island. Nat was at the tiller, Miss Lucas, her lap piled high with brown-paper packages, sat composedly in the bows, and Del, her winsome face aglow, was using her handkerchief alternately for waving enthusiastic greetings and wiping away the tears.

As the boat plunged and pitched shoreward through the heavy surf, Del leaned impetuously forward and stretched out both arms to the group that waited there. This sight was too much for Cap'n Noll and he dashed in recklessly through the tossing foam, caught up his Lady Blue-eyes and brought her triumphantly ashore on his shoulder. Eric, fired with a spirit of emulation, splashed through the waves with equal gallantry and tried to induce Miss Lucas, who weighed a good two pounds for every one of his, to entrust

herself to him; but the sedate housekeeper gave him the waterproof bag instead and was herself decorously jumped ashore by Mr. Yorke. Nat landed with an ungainly skip, but his mother sprang to meet him as joyously as if he had been a heaven-descended Apollo. And then there was such a confusion of hugging, kissing and handshaking, such a tumult of sobbing and laughter, that if it had not been for the presence of mind displayed by that admirable woman Miss Lucas, the fruits of this so eventful shopping expedition might have been washed out to sea to be food for the fishes.

But Robert, seeing the housekeeper's exertions to catch the packages as the boatman rapidly tossed them ashore, came nimbly to her assistance and shouted an invitation to the fisherman, when no more bundles were forthcoming, to land and take dinner with them.

"No, thankee," growled the grim skipper; "no, thankee. Neighbors is neighbors an' 'tother folks is 'tother folks. You don't want any furrin salt on your pertaters this here noon. Put up your purse, young man. I don't take money for breakin' the Sabbath day to keep it holy. This here is a work o' marcy an' a present to the little gal as took sech a fancy to my Nanny-boat. Tell her I shall allays think the better o' my Nancy for

carryin' sech a purty cargo. Good-day to ye all!"

And with a powerful pull at his oars the boatman shot out of hearing, Del kissing her hand to him in return for a parting flourish from the dingy old tarpaulin.

Up at the Brimblecomb cottage the welcomes had all to be gone through with again, the rosy little dame, who had been bustling about to get her dinner on the table, letting the chickens cool on the platter and the gravy boil over on the stove, while she flew about from one to another of the prodigals, embracing each in turn, including the big, blushing Robert, who thought privately that he had borne his share at dawn, and then in her enthusiasm beginning all over again. When the company were finally seated around the hospitable board, when Uncle Maurice had said grace, and the blustering captain, much badgered by Grandma Brimblecomb's incessant criticisms and directions, had finally succeeded in carving the fowls to her satisfaction, the dinner proceeded in merry fashion enough, though voices had a curious way of breaking in the middle of a sentence and no one was surprised at any moment to see his neighbor whisking away a tear. The events of the preceding day, on the island as well as off, were related over and over, amid

a general out-pouring of mingled condolence and congratulation.

Dolo was very quiet, but her eyes shone like stars. She wondered inwardly that such a wicked girl as she dared be so happy, but some way she could not help it. It was no time to think of herself—not even of her sins. God might punish her any way he liked, since he had not punished her by bringing death and grief upon the innocent. He had spared the boat-crew, because they were good and because people loved them so. That was just and kind. She was well content in her heart that it was God who was to punish her—God, and not another. But she need not think of punishment yet. That would be for by and by. This noon she could be glad with all the rest.

Nat was the only member of the party who seemed downcast.

“What’s wrong, my boy?” asked Mr. Yorke, quietly, putting his hand on Nat’s knee under the table.

“It’s—it’s your letter, father,” stammered Nat, turning red as all eyes were bent upon him; “I tried so hard to keep it safe, but when I got my ducking, there wasn’t a dry inch left on me, and the letter was so soaked I couldn’t mail it. I’m so sorry, father. Your answer will be late.”

"Nonsense, my son. The matter is not so pressing as all that. There's no harm done," replied the father, huskily, the tears—tears lay so near the edges of the eyes that day—starting at the boy's look and tone.

"You should have seen that fellow with his precious letter," laughed Robert. "He felt worse about the chance of getting that wet than about the likelihood of the whole of us being drowned. Cæsar with his *Commentaries* was nothing to him."

But Mr. Yorke stroked Nat's angular knee, until the lad choked over filial affection, or a chicken-bone, or possibly a combination of the two, and had to retire in confusion to the wood-shed, Grandma Brimblecomb skurrying after him with a glass of water and Eric kindly attending to thump his brother on the back.

When the feast of rejoicing was over, Grandma Brimblecomb began to heap a large dinner-plate with select morsels.

"Dolo dear," she called, "do you feel able to take this over to the Hermit? You said he ate the last chicken dinner I sent him."

Dolo started eagerly forward.

"Yes, indeed I feel able. The poor Hermit! I forgot all about him and he seemed ill night before last. Oh, let me go right away! His

roof is just a sieve and it did pour so hard yesterday."

"We will walk over with you, Delia and I," said her father. "We will not go near enough to frighten your friend, but this plate is too heavy for a little girl who never closed her eyes all last night. And what is this about the Hermit's roof? Does it leak? We must have it mended before the autumn rains come."

This was Dolo's opportunity and, as they walked, she poured out to the tall, grave man by her side, who was so kind and gentle it did not seem possible that he could be one and the same with the dreaded father of all these years, her fears and anxieties for the old recluse. Mr. Rexford listened thoughtfully and finally promised the Hermit house-room for the severe weather, in case Dolo could induce him, as was more than improbable, to accept the offer.

How strange it all was! Dolo felt as if she were walking in a dream. When would her punishment begin? Here was her father on one side carrying the Hermit's dinner for her, and here was Del on the other clinging to her hand. Del was trying to speak, but hesitated and flushed. That was not like Del. Del had something to tell her. What could it be?

"Oh, Dolo!" said Del, while their father list-

ened silently, "I have been such a selfish sister. It is so easy to be selfish. I didn't half know how bad I was till yesterday, but everything looked new and different to me in those minutes when the boat was almost sinking. There weren't any make-believes then. Oh, I never meant to be horrid and selfish—I never meant it; but I've always expected to have the best and most of everything and I've always had it. This going to school is like the rest. I expected all the time that I should be the one to go, and you the one to stay, and it seemed right enough and natural that way. But I'm ashamed of myself, Dolo, truly I am, and I want to tell you that I'm not going. It's you. And it's all settled. It's too late now to change, whatever you say. For all the things we bought, we bought for you. We went about shopping in the pouring rain, with the wind nearly blowing us off our feet and turning Miss Lucas' umbrella inside out, and I never had such fun in my life. It's no end nicer getting pretty things for you than for me. And everything is for you. I'm so glad it's too late for you to help it. We bought your colors and your sizes and gave your measures to the dressmaker. So you may just pack your trunk for Colorado. And I shall stay with father, on this dear, dear little island I thought I should never see again, and try

to make things cozier for him at home, if he'll let me."

"Oh, no, no, no!" gasped Dolo. "I don't deserve it. I can't take it. I ought to have bad things happen to me, not good things. I mustn't go."

"You must, though," retorted Del, blithely, swinging her sister's hand; "for I won't."

"Neither will I," said Dolo, firmly.

"Well, really!" laughed Mr. Rexford, though his eyelashes glistened queerly in the sunshine, "this is a new dilemma."

But at this point a sharp cry broke from Dolo's lips.

"See!" she cried; "oh, see! The Hermit's hut is down." And in an instant the girl, wringing her hands, had sped away with winged feet.

Mr. Rexford and Del looked after her with startled glances and then followed at the best of their speed. The Hermit's hovel was a heap of ruins. It was too evident that the violent gale had blown the crazy structure over. But where was the Hermit himself? Had he perished beneath the wreck of his lonely refuge? A faint groan made answer. Mr. Rexford's strong arm hurled the boards left and right, until he came upon the emaciated form of the old man, bruised and broken, but not yet devoid of life. Dolo

threw herself on her knees beside that poor, pathetic figure, the old butternut coat stained through and through with blood.

The Hermit, with the stir about him and the breath of the salt wind upon his face, roused to fleeting consciousness and smiled his shadowy smile up into the pitiful dark eyes bent over him.

“Wallet,” he whispered. “Pocket.”

Dolo’s trembling fingers found the wallet and, obeying the Hermit’s glance, gave it to her father.

The Hermit looked toward Mr. Rexford earnestly and feebly stirred his chill, gray hand, laying it on Dolo’s.

“For—her,” he whispered, with increasing difficulty; “only—friend.”

Then he seemed to sleep, but suddenly the dim eyes opened wide. Their brightening gaze was fixed on some object that the others could not see.

“The wood is sawed through,” he said, quite distinctly; “it falls at last. And the light is all about him.”

In a moment more Mr. Rexford gently drew Dolo’s hand from under the Hermit’s palm and dropped his handkerchief over the silent face.

The next day at twilight, as the little group of islanders moved softly away from around an open grave, Robert and Nat remaining to give the

sleeping form its coverlet of earth, Uncle Maurice, who had read the solemn service, laid his hand tenderly on Dolo's shoulder.

"Do not grieve for him longer, dear child," he said. "His life-shadow is already lost in the light of God. It was hard at the end, but we will trust that he was unconscious in the main and did not suffer overmuch. You were the one comfort of his later years and the gift he has left you in grateful memory will make it possible for both Del and yourself to go away to school for this one year at least. And we will hope that the future is keeping happy secrets. But the best of all is to remember that it was given you to minister to this saddened and bewildered spirit. He called you his 'only friend'. You should be glad to-night, my dear, as well as sorrowful."

"But I do not understand," sobbed Dolo; "people are so good to me, and beautiful things keep happening, for it is more beautiful than sad, though I never supposed that I could miss him so much, to know he is at rest. I would rather go away and leave him lying there than rocking himself back and forth on his doorstep, singing that unhappy song of his. Do you think they will teach him gladder songs in Heaven? But I have been a wicked, wicked girl—I can't tell you how wicked—and God does not punish me to make me good."

“Love and pardon, joy and blessing are among God’s ways of making us good,” said Uncle Maurice, dreamily; and Dolo, a rebel no longer, folded by the summer twilight, calmed by the grave music of the sea, bowed her young head in her first adoring sense of the Divine magnanimity, the large forgiveness and loving tenderness of God.

CHAPTER XVI.

MOONLIGHT ONCE MORE.

And lo! from opening clouds I saw emerge
The loveliest moon that ever silvered o'er
A shell from Neptune's goblet — she did soar
So passionately bright, my dazzled soul
Commingling with her ardent spheres did roll
Through clear and cloudy.

— JOHN KEATS.

HERE come the boys," said Del.
She was on her knees before a half-packed trunk. It was a shabby, old-fashioned little trunk, and her father was busy at the lid with hammer and tacks. Miss Lucas was sitting by the window, straining her eyes in the fading light to finish a piece of sewing she had in hand. Dolo, who had just been wiping the tea-plates and tea-cups, was hanging up her towel to dry. It was a warm August evening and the door stood wide open. In trooped the boys without the ceremony of knocking, Eric leading the way, Robert following and Nat awkwardly bringing up the

rear. Behind them at a short distance followed Grandma Brimblecomb and Cap'n Noll, Baby Merry being perched on her grandfather's broad shoulder.

"Come out and see the moonrise, girls," proposed Eric, eagerly; "it's going to be hunkydory."

"Oh, I wish we could!" exclaimed Del; "but look at this trunk."

"Pshaw, we'll help you," said Nat, advancing to the front; "what goes next? This jigger here? I'll ram it in for you."

And he made a dive toward a dainty hat, trimmed with a cherry ribbon.

Del screamed and beat him back with frantic little hands.

"Go away! We won't have any blundering boys among our pretty new things. Take him off, Rob."

"No good Samaritans wanted around here," said Robert, cheerfully, collaring his brother. "Stand back and mind your business! What do you know about girls' boarding-school duds? You'd jam that nice little kinney into an old shoe and call yourself a friend to the human race."

"I join the great host of the unappreciated," growled Nat, submissively retiring.

But now Del had turned her wrath on Robert. "Old shoes, indeed! Do you think we have any room for old shoes in that trunk? That's all you know about it."

"Well, I didn't exactly suppose girls went bare-foot in boarding-school," remarked Robert, with a mischievous glance at the little brown heel that peeped out from under the gray flannel skirt, where Del still knelt on the floor.

"We've left our old shoes for you boys to throw after us to-morrow morning for good luck," said Dolo, briefly.

"Don't take one of Rob's by mistake," put in Nat, revengefully; "'twould swamp the boat."

"I'll swamp you," observed Robert, over his shoulder. "You've been out of temper ever since we drew lots."

For the boys had resorted to this ancient and honorable device to determine which of them should accompany the party on the morrow, since there would be room for but one of the three. It had been settled that Cap'n Noll should take with him his Lady Blue-eyes and also Mr. Rexford, who desired personally to put his daughters into Mr. Grafton's charge, that gentleman, for dread of seasickness, awaiting their arrival on the coast. In the Yorke boat, which was a little larger, would go the trunk, with Uncle Maurice, who had

business on the mainland, Dolo and Robert, for so the fates decreed.

“Oh, hang it all! Stop fooling and come out and see the moonrise,” pleaded Eric, who was no less sensitive than Nat on the subject of the lots. “It’s the last full moon we’ll see together on Hermit Island for nobody knows how long—maybe forever.”

The boy’s last words were drowned in a burst of expostulation from the indignant quartette, whose parts, as nearly as they could be distinguished, ran thus.

“Oh, Eric!” “Who’ll kick him for a nickel?”
“Next summer.” “Dry up!”

“Don’t go to throwing cold water on ice,” added Nat, in a concluding growl. “What’s the use, as Shakespeare says—or words to that effect—of painting indigo blue? Don’t we feel glum enough already, without your croaking like Poe’s raven? Get out with you!”

And the two lads went down upon the floor together in a brotherly rough-and-tumble.

“What’s all this?” said Mr. Rexford, who had been welcoming Grandma Brimblecomb and the captain. “What’s this four-legged bunch of boy doing under my feet? Off with you, every one! Only don’t be out late, for we want to start bright and early in the morning.”

The boys had not yet ceased to stand somewhat in awe of Mr. Rexford and at his command they scuddled to the door. But the girls lingered, torn by conflicting desires.

"Why, father, we can't be spared," said Del, with an air of injured dignity.

"I can get on faster without them," observed Miss Lucas, without raising her eyes from her sewing.

Del pouted and Dolo shrugged her left shoulder. Then they both laughed and followed the boys toward the door, but turned again on the threshold.

"Miss Lucas, you'll spoil your eyes," remonstrated Del.

Perhaps something was already wrong with the housekeeper's expressionless orbs of vision. It is certain that she was blinking queerly as she bent over her work, and there was almost a quaver in her dull tones as she answered—

"There'll be nothing left to see after to-morrow. It's no matter if I do spoil them to-night."

"Oh, let me stay and help!" cried Del, with affectionate impulsiveness, running back and trying to pull the unfinished garment from Miss Lucas' hand.

"No, no; run along with the boys—poor fellows!" said Grandma Brimblecomb; "but look

here first, my dears, at the lunch I've put up for you to take to-morrow. I knew in the hurry none of you would think of that. See, Del, here is the kissing-crust you like, and these are Dolo's favorite snuckadoodles. No, I shan't let you see the rest. That is to be for a surprise. Del, child, stop peeking under that napkin. Oh, I don't mind if you do see those, little pry-nose. They are the very snappiest gingersnaps I ever made. But the surprise is at the bottom of the basket. Dear, dear, whatever shall I do without my girlies? But now run along. You children ought to have a good-by stroll together. I'll stay and help Miss Lucas. That's what I came over for. And I shall be down at the boats to see you off to-morrow morning."

"Won't you please come with us, father?" asked Dolo, shyly.

Mr. Rexford looked surprised and pleased.

"Thank you, Dolorosa," he said. "I'll come a little later and bring my daughters home."

"No, come now," commanded Baby Merry, from her eminence. "Gramp is coming now. We're going to see moony."

"No, we're not, chuckie," protested the captain. "It's your bed-time and I'm going to take you home."

"If you do," said Baby Merry, sweetly, "I'll

scream all the way and not go to sleep till fornever."

"You'll catch it, if you're naughty," said Cap'n Noll, severely.

"Naughty yourself!" retorted Baby. "Speak to me that way 'gain, an' Mr. Monk an' I we'll get right down off your shoulder an' walk with Dolo. Good people go to heaven, gramp. Bad people go to hell, gramp. How do you feel now, gramp?"

"O-li-ver Crom-well Brimble-*comb*!" interposed the grandmother, wrinkling up her rosy face, as she shook her head at the unregenerate infant, into an expression of mournful disapproval, while her chubby sides were shaking with secret laughter; "you'll never have a particle of discipline, if you live to be as big as a whale. Why do you want to get up a scene with the child this last night? You know she'll have her own way in the end."

Baby emphasized her grandmother's position by tousling and pulling the bushy whiskers, and the colossal captain, as usual, yielded a crestfallen submission.

So the moon-gazers proceeded to the beach, Del racing ahead with the boys, and Dolo walking soberly beside Cap'n Noll, occasionally pressing to her cheek Baby Merry's dangling little foot.

The sunset light still lingered in the West. A broad band of salmon, merging into lavender, lay along the horizon. The clumps of beach-grass were blanched in the strange twilight. Throwing themselves down on the beach, where the sand was soft and dry, the little company of friends, chatting in lowered tones, watched for the rising of the moon. They had not long to wait. An orange glow that ran far up the sky heralded her stately coming, and suddenly as if from out the depths of the ocean the moon sprang round and red, casting a shaft of ruddiest light far down through the tremulous water.

"I think that's a fire-balloon an' pretty soon 'twill all blaze up," remarked Baby Merry, whose short memory still held in grasp the enchanting visions that rose from the mainland on the evening of the Fourth of July.

"No, dear," said Dolo; "that's the moon."

Baby Merry did not often contradict Dolo, but her determined little soul could not bear to yield the point entirely. So she shifted her ground.

"If I ask God, I guess he'll turn moony into a fire-balloon and let it blaze up for me."

"Not—not—not to-night," said stammering Nat, as Dolo was silent; "perhaps some other night."

The moon, now veiled in a passing cloud, still

threw faint rose-lights across the upper sky, while a ruddy lake beneath the dark edges of the drift testified to her unseen presence. But when she flashed forth again through a high, narrow cleft, her color was pure golden.

“Moony has rubbed her red off goin’ through the cloud,” remarked Baby Merry.

“This here moonshine,” rumbled the gruff voice of Cap’n Noll, “puts me in mind of a moonlight night out on the Pacific, when my crew mutinied. I had almost all hands Portuguese that voyage an’ there was a rascal in the forecastle who put em’ up to the notion of stealin’ the ship an’ cruisin’ under the black flag. I was settin’ at my cabin-table when I heard a rush o’ feet an’ I had hardly time to snatch up a revolver, when I found myself facin’ the wolfish eyes of a score of murderous villains. My wife an’ my daughter, Baby Merry’s mother as was to be, a slim gal o’ fifteen, were behind me, an’ except for them I stood alone. Do you think I winced? I never stirred an eyelid. I up with my revolver an’ I thundered—‘The first man as moves from his place’”—

“Gramp, I want to talk,” interruped Baby Merry; “I want to tell a story.”

“But jest let gramp finish his yarn, chuckie,” pleaded the disappointed romancer.

"No," said Baby Merry, with an extra degree of decision, born of sleepiness; "I like my own yarns best. Once Angel comed down from Heaven to see Octopus. An' he said, 'Now mind, you've got to be good Octopus to-day'. An' Octopus said, 'Oh, no, don't want to be good Octopus to-day'. But Angel he frowned an' said, 'I tell you you've got to be good Octopus to-day'. Then Octopus said, 'Well, I don't care. If I have to be good Octopus to-day, I'll be baddest Octopus ever was to-morrer'. An' Angel said, 'I ain't talkin' 'bout to-morrer. You be good Octopus to-day.' So Octopus had to be good Octopus that day, but oh! he was awful bad Octopus to-morrer."

And at the conclusion of this very characteristic fable, Baby Merry gave such an unmistakable gape that the wily captain was emboldened to suggest—

"Let's go up home now an' look at the Octopus in your picter-book."

"Yes, want to see Octopus," replied the child, drowsily; "but want to tell Dolo good-night first."

So Cap'n Noll deposited his beloved little burden in Dolo's arms, saying proudly, as he turned to Del and the boys—

"It really beats me where that child got her imagination."

Nat coughed significantly, for which Eric—always the captain's champion—punched him with vengeful energy under cover of the shadows, while Robert added a kick in the interests of good manners.

Meanwhile Baby Merry was clinging fast to Dolo's neck.

"I don't want you to go away," the child whispered.

"I must, dear," replied Dolo, softly; "but I'll come back again some day."

"Some day," repeated Baby Merry. Then with a funny little sigh she thrust Mr. Monk, gay red jacket and all, staring button-eyes and all, into Dolo's hand.

"He's for you," a choking baby-voice said in Dolo's ear, and before the girl could recover her self-command, the child had been lifted up in her grandfather's arms and borne away toward home.

Slipping Mr. Monk under a fold of her skirt, so that the mischievous eyes of the boys should not detect him, Dolo, with the tenderest tears she ever shed knocking at the back of her eyes, remembered the treasure-chest. It was no longer empty. The Hermit's tattered wallet, with the bow of yellowish ribbon, was in it, and a beautiful cabinet photograph of her mother, which one evening her father had silently brought and given

to her. He had given a duplicate to Del, also, but Del had no rusty wallet and no ridiculous Mr. Monk—treasures more precious in Dolo's sight than all the maritime spoils which Cap'n Noll had so lavishly bestowed upon his Lady Blue-eyes.

Then the boys and girls, resting on the familiar beach, as they had rested in a happy group so many summer evenings before, watched the changing glories of the moonlight and chatted quietly, with intervals of silence.

“Do you know,” asked Robert, suddenly, “what a queer thing I stumbled upon under the bluff to-day? It was a pillow-case, all weather-stained, as if it had been out in the storm, and with the name Rexford marked on it.”

“Why, it must be Dolo's,” said Del, in great surprise. “When we went to bed that Sunday night, her pillow-case was gone and her pillow was all bare.”

“Whew!” whistled Nat; “first time I ever heard of a gale strong enough to walk into a room and blow a pillow-case off the pillow and out at the window, but that storm was a tearer, and no mistake.”

Dolo said nothing. Those keen young eyes of hers were dim with age before she ever related to human ear the history of that blackest night of her childhood.

"What a dreadful time that was!" said Del, with a shudder. "I believe it was worse for you here, than for us there."

"You bet," said Eric, emphatically. "I only eat one griddle-cake for breakfast and there was maple syrup, too. But Dolo was the worst. She acted just like a porcupine, and set up a howl if a fellow so much as came near her."

"Stick to your natural history, young man," interposed Nat. "The porcupine isn't a howler. His tuneful note, among the birds of the forest, is a shrill grunt. Take John Burroughs' word for it. And I know Dolo didn't do any shrill grunting, however bad she felt. Stand up and apologize."

"I'll apologize. I'll do anything," said Eric, eagerly, "if only Rob will give me his place in the boat to-morrow. There's no sense in lots, Rob, and you don't care about going one quarter as much as I do. Come, that's a good fellow!"

"Why should Rob give up his place to you any more than to me?" demanded Nat.

"Well, you're a hedgehog, anyhow, or any kind of a pig there is going," retorted Eric, indignantly. "Don't you skip off to New York for all winter and leave Rob and me here to tend farm? You won't begin to miss the girls as much as we shall. Only Rob doesn't mind—Rob's such a jolly fellow. Say, Rob, can't I go?"

"No flattery," said the eldest brother. "I'm afraid you're not strong enough. I don't want father to have much rowing to do."

"No," chimed in Nat; "of course not. And Eric's no good for a long pull."

"I am, too," insisted Eric, with boyish vehemence. "Do let me go, Rob. Del wants me to. I'll pull as hard as you could, if it makes me lame for a week afterward. Say, Rob, don't be mean."

"Well, you can go," said Robert, and if there was disappointment in his heart, there was nothing but kindness in his voice.

Eric uttered a whoop of gratitude and leapt upon his brother with a miscellaneous embrace of arms and legs.

Presently Uncle Maurice, with stooping shoulders and hands clasped behind the back, came strolling along the beach and, in response to an eager call of welcome, joined the group. For a while he seemed disinclined to talk, preferring his own reverie as, reclining on the sand, he watched the fanciful effects wrought in the fleecy clouds by the swift-gliding moon. She cast upon the wind-blown drift, as she sped softly on her shining way, all exquisite, ethereal tints—amber, silvery, violet—the glorified cloud-edges shaping themselves into ever new, fantastic forms, that teased and yet bewitched imagination.

"Uncle Maurice, you will miss the island more than any of us," remarked Dolo, with her old abruptness.

Nat frowned. He was not pleased to have the conversation take this turn. In the depths of his soul he trembled yet for fear lest his father should not have strength to keep the hard-made resolution. The boy scraped his foot uneasily across the sand and wished once more that Dolo would let his father alone.

"I shall be homesick often and often for my dream-haunted solitude," replied Uncle Maurice, sadly. "I had not thought to forsake it so soon as this. My book is not yet written. But when the boys are educated, I shall come back. The island has never been a place of exile nor a prison to me, but a land of dear enchantment. Yes;

"The isle is full of noises,
Sounds and sweet airs, that give delight and hurt not,
Sometimes a thousand twangling instruments
Will hum about mine ears; and sometimes voices
That, if I then had wak'd after long sleep,
Would make me sleep again; and then, in dreaming,
The clouds methought would open, and show riches
Ready to drop upon me.'

"But not riches of this world's prizeing," added Uncle Maurice, with his gentle smile. The chil-

dren felt the smile through his tone. They did not need to look at his face.

“When do you go, Uncle Maurice?” asked Del, stroking the threadbare coatsleeve.

“I enter upon my duties the first of October,” replied Uncle Maurice, with a pathetic touch of resignation in the sweet-voiced tones; “but we shall go on to New York earlier than that—as soon as Nick is able to bear the journey. His mother is anxious to get him away before the cold fall-winds come.”

“Won’t you miss us a little as well as the island?” asked Del, again.

“Miss my school? Miss my children?” queried Uncle Maurice; “ah, sorely, sorely! Whenever the moon is at the full, as it is to-night, as we have so often watched it together, I shall wander out and feed my heart with what narrow strips of sky the city streets will let me see, and I shall think of each of you, dear girls and boys, with love and memory and hope and prayer.”

“Will you think of Dolo and me way off in Colorado, in our pretty new dresses, among all the boarding-school girls?” asked Del, urging down a great lump in her throat.

“Maybe those girls won’t like us. Maybe we’ll seem queer to them. Maybe our trunk will look

small and our new clothes outlandish, after all," suggested Dolo.

"I will think of you both," said Uncle Maurice; "two brave, faithful little sisters, climbing the steep hillside every day—none the worse for a tumble now and then—toward the palace of truth and love."

"You won't need to think of me, because I'll come out and walk with you," said Nat, sturdily.

"Think of Rob and me shut in by the icewalls, all shining with beautiful colors, like rainbows, where the surf freezes before it falls," put in Eric, eagerly. "Oh, Nat, I'm so sorry for you, spending the whole winter in a stupid city! It will be pretty tough not to see papa and mamma for so long, but I wouldn't live away from the sea for anything. Hear it this minute. How does any one ever go to sleep without the sound of the surf?"

"Think of Eric as eating the Brimblecombs out of house and home," laughed Robert; "you'd better pay a double board for that fellow at the outset, father, if you want to save a lawsuit in the end. And when he isn't eating, he'll be setting Major on poor old Frisk or swallowing whole all Cap'n Noll's cockolorum yarns."

"And how shall I think of my eldest son?"

asked Mr. Yorke, with a peculiar tenderness, almost reverence, in his tone.

“Think of him as being the salt of the earth,” cried Del, impulsively.

“Salt of the sea, you’d better say,” corrected Nat.

“Salt’s a pretty common virtue round here,” commented Robert, good-naturedly; “but I never expect to live up to more than the common virtues.”

“It is late. We must go in,” said Uncle Maurice, rising. “The moon does her errands, let us do ours, if not

‘With the moon’s beauty and the moon’s soft pace,’ yet as fairly and gently as we may. Good-night, dear children mine—good-night till next summer.”

“Till next summer,” echoed the girls and boys, with husky voices.

“Till next summer,” repeated the deep tones of Mr. Rexford, who had come upon them unnoticed in the dusk and was waiting to take his daughters home.

THE END.

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